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REALMS OF FANTASY

COVER: The dragon and its elf-lord rider protect the Earth's life-stone in Don Maitz's Darkness at Sethanon. *ABOVE: Set in the Lands of Once Upon a Time, fairy tales have much to say about our own time. See Folkroots on page 26. Illustration by Kay Nielsen for* East of the Sun, West of the Moon.

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LAST UNICORN GAMES

Summer 1995

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I have been subscribing to the magazine since the first issue, and I love it. The stories are well written and the regular features are interesting and informational. I must admit, as a person going for her MBA, I do not run into a lot of fantasy lovers. As a result, it is hard for me to find books that I like—usually I resort to reading the back of the book in the bookstore. There is no such thing as "word of mouth" among my circle of friends.

Therefore, *Realms* is refreshing. Every two months (I wish it were every month), I have the opportunity to read stories I know I will like. In addition, I find authors that I enjoy reading, and I can look up their novels in the bookstore or library. Needless to say, I love the book review column!

I just wanted to let you know what a good job you are doing. In addition to the previously mentioned, I love the Gallery section and the section discussing some of the myth behind the magic. Terri Windling is an excellent author, and you are lucky to have such a wonderful contributor.

I have already renewed my subscription for two more years!

Kerri Kutz
North Canton, OH

I'm delighted that you like the magazine, and I know how lucky I am to have Terri. But I don't think I've said here yet how lucky I am to have such talented writers contributing to the magazine. Thanks, all.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

You asked for comments from readers, so please allow me to offer my thirty-two cents worth on your April issue. I really enjoyed three stories: John Moore's "Excerpts from the Diary of Samuel Pepys" is an amusing, thought-provoking example of alternate-history fantasy. It captures the flavor and mindset of its time, place and narrator as well as the surface details. I especially like the way Moore grounds a bizarre, supernatural piece in down to earth reality. The contrast strengthens and makes memorable both aspects of his story. Caroline Ives Gilman's "Random Noise" is another winner, a powerful and timely examination of what might happen as the new man-made world of the Information Age interacts with the timeless natural worlds of the biosphere. And Margaret Ball's "Hold Me Fast and Fear Not" is a lovely, poignant sense-of-wonder fantasy on a classic theme. The author skillfully depicts the plight of her protagonist, caught in a painful dilemma in which there are no easy solutions.

I also want to thank Michael Cassutt and Jeanne Cavelos for their contributions. I must say, though, that I think it's a matter of brand new horrors emerging daily that makes it difficult for readers to cope, rather than the sheer number of them. Imagine if someone, in the spring of '94 had said that a media event was coming that would make the coverage of Bobbitt, Harding, Allen, and Buttafucco look restrained and tasteful? How can horror fiction help a reader deal with a development as unprecedented as this, when so much of our nation's consciousness is directed at an event which only affected a handful of people?

Well, enough of that. I'm looking forward to the next issue.

Sincerely,
Mary Anne Landers
Russellville, AR

Thanks for a thoughtful reading of the magazine, I appreciate your interest, and I'm sure the contributors do as well.

Dear Shawna,

Since the September issue of the magazine, I've been more than a bit impressed. Initially, I subscribed due to a card in *Science Fiction Age*— on it was a reduced image of the debut issue's cover. I subscribed, being both a fan of Whelan's art and a devout Magian Liner—a follower of every step the especial Mr. Gaiman takes. It was silly, I suppose, to subscribe only for these surface reasons, but I *had* been looking for a fantasy mag to hook my friends on.

I am ever so sorry I had so little faith, there can be no other item like this on the shelves and it's a damn good thing I don't have to claw my way to the newsstand to grab one. Around these parts, it's no inconsiderable task to acquire an issue. Incidentally, I'd like to request more of Terri Windling's "Folkroots." Too bad it can't have its own mag. Also, more Brian Froud, J.K. Potter, Tom Canty, and—of course—as much Neil as you can possibly allow. Check out *Angels and Visitations* from Dreamhaven, all you fans of "Troll Bridge." And Shawna, don't you ever leave, y'hear?

Best,
Mark E. Roberts
La Mirabda, CA

Believe me, I'd like nothing better to run a Neil Gaiman story in every issue—I'm a huge fan of his, and I think he's a brilliant writer. Problem is, he has to send 'em to me, before I can run them. You reading this, Neil?

Your letters and comments are welcome. Make sure you mark them as letters or they're likely to get mixed in with writer's guidelines requests. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet e-mail: s.m ccarthy@genie.geis.com.

REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 6

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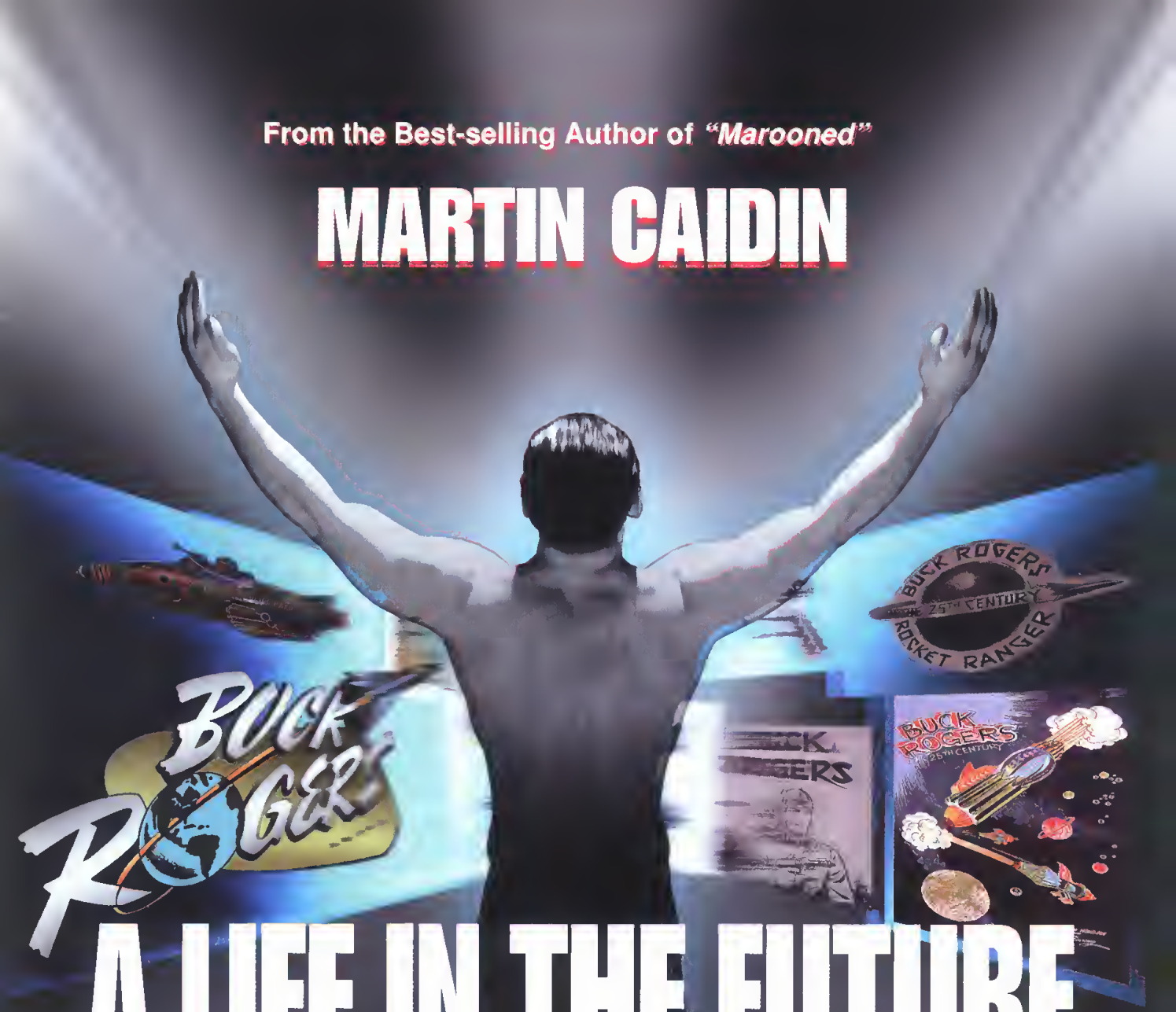
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BY SHAWNA MCCARTHY

The SF and Fantasy field has a special sense of community and continuity.

THE OTHER DAY I GOT AN IMPORTANT PHONE CALL WHILE WORKING ON SOMETHING FOR the magazine. I jotted down some notes on a handy scrap of paper and brought the notes into the office where I work as a literary agent. I left them with the company president for his advice. The next day he told me what he thought about the problem but then said, "You know, I happened to read the letter that you scribbled those notes on. It was from a fifteen-year-old girl in Iowa who was telling you that your magazine has showed her how much fun reading can be. It was a really touching letter and it made me think that you might have changed this kid's life. Maybe you've taken her from being one of the vast majority who hate to read to being one of the lucky few who can open a door to the universe at will."

Well, maybe he didn't say those *exact* words, but that's pretty much the gist of it. After feeling guilty for using such a touching letter as scrap paper, I got to thinking about what he'd said. It's certainly true that a magazine like this can have an effect on young readers. I know this from personal experience—as a young girl, I read *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and the late, lamented *If* whenever I could get my hands on them, which wasn't very often. (It never occurred to me to get a subscription.) I devoured each issue the instant it came into my hands, and then went to the library to look for books by the authors I'd found in their pages. In this way a life-long hunger for books and words was born, and even more specifically, a desire to find a way to get *paid* for reading the stuff was formed. It was right then and there that the kernel of my present self and life was formed. Had it not been for those back date magazines, I might very well not be sitting here typing this for you today.



Like the storytellers of old, a magazine like Realms of Fantasy *can open the door to the universe through a love for reading.*

Thus I think a community is formed—I went on to become an editor and to meet all of the writers whose work I so admired and whose stories changed my life. They in turn were kind and considerate to a nervous baby editor, giving me the confidence in my skills to continue in my work and to be able to reach a position in which I am now able to encourage nervous young writers. Who perhaps will one day become Old Masters who will encourage a young editor who will—well, you get the point, I think.

Because the funny thing about the science fiction and fantasy community is its accessibility. The writers and editors do not (with a few notable exceptions) stay closeted in their ivory towers—they travel to conventions and workshops and schools and libraries and they meet not only their colleagues but their fans as well. They advise and encourage and debate and discuss until dawn's early light breaks through the hotel suite's curtain (true, a good deal of this is fueled as much by a love of single malt as by a Burning Love of Literature, but still, it's fun).

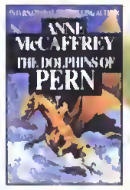
Having recently attended the Nebulas, I can once again attest to the truly remarkable sense of community and continuity one finds in the SF and Fantasy field—I saw old friends that I hadn't seen in ages, new writers whose stories I'd just bought for the magazine, new novelists whose work I'd just sold to publishers, and other editors and agents whom, I realized with some chagrin, I'd known for some seventeen years. (Gulp.) I made special note of the fact that the new writers were welcomed to the fold with as much pleasure as the old hands.

It never ceases to amaze newcomers to the field that we really do All Know Each Other. But more than knowing, I think that for the most part we support each other. Despite often vicious arguments over the form, function, and place of the genre, at the heart of the matter is the fact that we all know that when push comes to shove, we're here for each other.

It's a powerful force to have beneath your wings, whether you're a fledgling author, editor, or reader. We should all savor our connection to it. ❧

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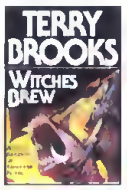
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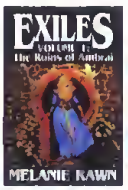
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BY GAHAN WILSON

A *world-class embalmer, a werewolf mystery and an alien invasion add up to fantastic fun.*

THE UNNATURAL IS AN EXTREMELY PROMISING FIRST NOVEL BY A DAVID PRILL, WHOSE touchingly hopeful Midwestern face (I used to have a touchingly hopeful Midwestern face!) looks up at us from the back flap of the book's dust jacket over a blurb saying as how he currently lives in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area (truly a hotbed of the macabre), and as how most everything he's done up to now has taken place in Minnesota. My guess, based on this book, is that if he keeps developing his skills and honing other novels, he will probably find himself in New York or Los Angeles before he knows it's hit him, poor bastard.

In the first half of *The Unnatural* (St. Martin's Press, NY, 237 pp., hardcover, $21.00) maybe even the first two-thirds, Prill locates and speaks from a point of view which delicately balances deep compassion for the human race with a clear eye for its bottomless stupidity. His characters run to and embrace the pit of darkness with a fresh-eyed innocence and an upbeat enthusiasm which is simultaneously hilarious, heartwarming, and and heartbreaking.

The preface lays the ground extremely well by following young Andy Archway, a superlatively earnest lad of nine, as he desperately cons his way into a tacky carnival sideshow in order to see, and perhaps even speak to, his lifelong hero and idol: Mordecai, by far the most legendary undertaker of them all, the one who broke the great Holme's record for embalming corpses back in '42.



Robert Charles Wilson's Mysterium *traces the strange events which happen when science and religion interweave.*

Andy does manage to meet the great man, and the encounter—which might have daunted and perhaps even crushed a dreaming youth less dedicated to his cause—puts the seal on his ambition and increases his determination to be the next Mordecai.

Time passes, and in Chapter One we find ourselves in the folksy company of lovable Wallace "Wake" Wakefield, traveling scout for P.T. Sunnyside's internationally renowned funerary organization, headquartered at Rancho Norman Rockwell, California.

Wake comes across young Andy, now just graduated from high school, and he is profoundly moved by a "funeral diorama" executed by the lad in which a fisherman's corpse—with a smile on his sewn mouth and treated with injections of food dyes to appear reddened from the sun—is reclining in a motor boat and is nestled in clouds of cotton matting with a fishing pole on his lap and a winged and haloed baby doll to keep him eternal company.

Wake knows raw talent when he sees it, so without ado, he sets about negotiations with the boy's family. In the end it is agreed that if Andy accepts a sizeable binding sum and a course of education at the prestigious Thomas Holmes University of Embalming and Funerary Practices, he will sign a contract to line up with the forces of P.T. Sunnyside. Both the boy and the agent are ecstatic.

At Holmes U, Andy meets his assigned school "buddy," the outgoing and popular and sporty Daniel J. Slade, and plunges into the curriculum, which pretty much covers everything a budding mortician might need to know, from techniques of preparation to grief handling to how to steer the bereaved client to the more expensive caskets, this last lesson aided and abetted by the clever use of miniature plastic coffins as teaching aids.

An extracurricular—but hardly extracollegiate—event is Andy's involvement with Coach Crok and the school embalming team. There are exciting ups and downs in Andy's entrance into the sporting arena, but when he gets his big chance, Andy shows his stuff and his ability *to* stuff, and the rumor begins to circulate that the man to challenge the great Mordecai's embalming record may

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have at last arrived upon the scene.

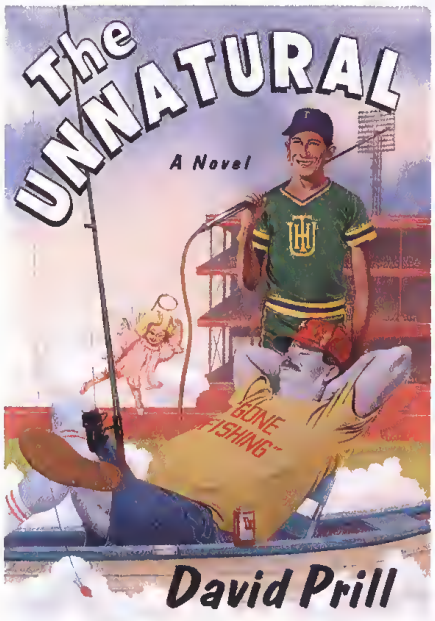
Andy also encounters the lovely and understanding Maria Eldorada, a talented stonemason, and her immediate and responding interest in young Archway leads to an off and on romance which meanders throughout the book. And when, during the summer break, he actually encounters none other than P.T. Sunnyside in person, the boy and the famed entrepreneur hit it off splendidly, and it seems absolutely assured that Andy's career will be a smooth upward swoop.

But life is never that simple, at least not if you want to keep your book interesting, and Archway eventually encounters the forces of evil, represented in the persons of the runty Drabford brothers—Everette, Bob, and Preston—who run the only other funerary organization which operates on a scale comparable to P.T.'s. The Drabford's outfit is headquartered at the 909 Ranch in upstate Florida rather than P.T.'s California, so the additional complication of the never-ending competition between the moods and lifestyles of the two great Sunshine states is subtly introduced.

The Drabfords know talent when they see it, and their encounter with Archway determines them to make him one of their own, if they can, to join them in their campaign to introduce a mysterious and radical new notion called post-need care, which the brothers intend to introduce into the undertaking business and with which they hope to put P.T. Sunnyside out of business.

So far, so good, and even when Archway is flown—via various plot twists best left uncovered in a review—to the desperate Third World country of Soma and has his first encounters with that unfortunate realm's steadily increasing supply of increasing multitudes of dead bodies available for embalmment, *still* so far, so good.

But then, alas, at least so far as this reader is concerned, the delicate, satirical tone of the novel's balance is lost as the author permits—one might even say *forces*, since it is really so much against the character's grain—his hero to lose his gentle inability to comprehend the gloomier, starker, and more dispiriting implications of corpses and of death.



Fresh out of school, Andy creates a "funeral diorama" of a fisherman's corpse. Art by David Beck.

Once Prill allows that frame of mind to intrude, the singularly painfully notion that death is (when you get right down to it) horribly depressing and that the grief resulting from its impact can be everlastingly unbearable, you have crossed a line which carries both *The Unnatural* and its hero into an area where neither can satisfactorily function or even exist.

Actually, what happens is worse than a recognition of tragedy, since the book, by attempting to climb back into and recover its former stance, refuses the stark acceptance tragedy requires and needs if it is to be handled at all. What happens is that the book slides slowly and irredeemably into the very sort of sentimentality it so adroitly gave the finger to in its earlier stages. Even the end notion, a very funny notion of a kind of Johnny Appleseed mortician wandering about the country with a portable funeral parlor, is maudlinized. The Hallmark card approach which *The Unnatural* does such a fine job of scorning in its beginning is finally wandered into.

But this is, after all, only Prill's first attempt. The first part of it is really grand stuff. Anybody that can pull that sort of work off will surely get the hang of staying with it all the way through as he settles down and really gets into his game. Keep your eye on him. The kid's a contender.

Moondog, by Henry Garfield, St. Martin's Press, NY, 258 pp., hardcover, $21.00.

Another first novel, but one of an altogether different stripe, is *Moondog* by Henry Garfield.

This is a straightforward werewolf yarn which moves along in the classic pattern and follows the rules; the twist Garfield's given to it is to have the action take place in convincing Steinbeck country amidst Steinbeckian folk, all of whom are quite well realized and true to the master's leanings. It is a pleasant kind of "Wolfman visits Cannery Row," which I found to be an unpretentiously entertaining book.

The author has placed the action in the little town of Julian, located in the mountains in San Diego County, California. The town does exist and the descriptions are true to the place. Julian was a mining town which, like most other mining towns, went bust in a big way after the easily got at gold ran out, and, also like most mining towns, it counts for a good deal of its income on the tourist trade.

In order to keep this tourist trade coming, the place is kept as quaint as possible, the names of the stores, bars, and restaurants do all they can to conjure up associations with bygone days, and a good deal of time and thought is given to creating festivals and other special events timed to keep producing as many return visits as possible.

The narrator of the story is a small burglar named Joe Action who, discouraged by his time in jail, has decided to opt for a lifestyle which doesn't perpetually risk incarceration.

Books To Look For

Traveling with the Dead, by Barbara Hambly (Ballantine/Del Rey, hardcover, $22.00). The noted fantasist returns with a more horrific tinge—a British secret agent gets conscripted into a political vampire hunt through the capitals of Europe.

Vampire Diary: The Embrace, by Michael Rein-Hagen and Robert Weinberg (White Wolf, diary format—hand-written and illustrated). This is a clever combination of novel and graphic novel—it's the hand-written and illustrated diary of a young LA bartender who starts hanging out with the *really* wrong crowd. This package, with its various inserts and notes, should appeal to those readers who appreciate interaction with their fiction.

The Belgariad, Part One, by David Eddings (Ballantine/Del Rey, hardcover, $29.95). For those who have always wanted to have their monumental fantasy all in one place, here at last are the first three volumes of Edding's bestselling series.

King's Quest: The Floating Castle, by Craig Mills (Boulevard, mass market, $5.99). The world's best-selling computer game, the seven-volume *King's Quest* series from Sierra On Line, has been translated into novels. This is the first of four to come, and fans of the game are sure to enjoy it.

Quest of the Dream Warrior: Kyla's Journey, story by Mercedes Lackey and David Arkenstone, instrumentals by David Arkenstone (Narada, $13.98 CD; $9.98 cassette; 800-966-3699). This is a remarkable package which is certain to appeal to fantasy readers and New Age music fans. It's a CD recording by best-selling New Age musician David Arkenstone, combined with an original 24-page story by Mercedes Lackey, and a full-color illustrated map outlining the quest of Kyla, a huntress and seer who must free her people from the encroaching Shadow. It's a true "multi-media" project—artist Michael Whelan even appears on the disk, playing Synclavier and synthesizers.

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He comes to Julian because that's where a job washing dishes in a restaurant has been arranged for him, and he settles in one of a cluster of decrepit little cabins in "Sleepy Hollow" because that's the place the proprietor of the restaurant wants him to live because he's made a payment arrangement with the place.

Acton's neighbors and fellow cabin dwellers are all inhabitants of the holes in society's safety net, the bulk of them being alcoholic or mentally malfunctioning in some other crippling fashion, but they are not all that bad a lot.

Some can be a little irritating, such as the married dopester in a nearby cabin who sometimes spends nearly the entire night noisily whacking with maddeningly regular blows of his miner's hammer at rocks he's gathered up or just found waiting for him. His idea is to see if they have gold hidden within them. Of course it goes without saying that they do not.

Some of them are extremely likeable sorts, such as Blind Ben, whose cabin is open to all comers whether he's there or not. Ben and a good many of his visitors are musically inclined, if eccentrically so, and indulge themselves in long, amiable sessions. Now and then, Ben straps a pack on his back and goes off on a hike in the woodsy mountains all by himself, feeling his way along the nature trails.

Not too long before Acton's arrival, this bucolic peacefulness was gruesomely disturbed by the mutilation murder of a woman on a full moon night, and not too long after he's settled into Julian, another woman is also horribly and violently killed, also on a full moon night.

Now, of course, you and I instantly make the connection, but the folk of Julian, like those in any number of those dear old black and white pictures out of Universal, seem to be a little slow on the uptake.

There is only one among them, an eccentric fellow named Cyrus "Moondog" Nygerski, who writes occasional columns for a couple of the small local weekly papers, who is aware of the obvious explanation, but when he writes an article which advances the theory that a werewolf is probably responsible, he sets the townsfolk into an uproar, mainly because they're afraid it might discourage their beloved tourism along the lines of *Jaws*, and he gets the interested attention of the local law authorities firmly fixed on him and his doings. I suppose that makes this a good cautionary book for people like ourselves who read magazines like *Realms of Fantasy* and are crammed full of nutsy ideas. We should remember to watch our mouths when we talk to ordinary people.

By now Acton is part-timing at the more respectable of the town's papers, the *Julian Nugget*, which is edited by the profoundly unhappily married Eric Gunn, and has become chums with Moondog. The two of them form a perfectly acceptable Holmes and Watson team—Acton is a nonbeliever in

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werewolves and therefore obviously the Watson— and they and the reader attempt to guess which of the odd and eccentric souls of Julian is, knowingly or unknowingly, the werewolf.

The suspense builds; there are enjoyably scary scenes, particularly one routine with a bunch of ninnies who decide to go on a group cross-country bike ride in the full moonlight (I swear, some people are dense beyond belief!); and in the end, the werewolf is so satisfactorily met with and dispatched that I could almost taste the buttered popcorn.

***Mysterium**, by Robert Charles Wilson, Bantam Books, NY., 309 pp., paperback, $5.99.*

Mysterium by Robert Charles Wilson very satisfyingly demonstrates the astoundingly wide range which science fiction affords the intelligent practitioner. Wilson plucks strands from any number of subgenres in the fields: the alternative universe, alien intrusion, dystopias, odd powers of the mind, and—one of the most interesting of them all—the strange dances and events which happen when science and religion helter skelter find themselves interweaving, neither sure of its boundaries or powers.

The story starts with one of the oldest and most reliable of creepy openings. A party of archaeologists come across a mysterious object in the deserts of Turkey. The thing refuses to fit into our matrixes. It isn't made of anything we can analyze or manipulate. It doesn't look the same if you come at it from different directions.

And it's dangerous to play with, it can kill you if you touch it.

Eventually it is taken from the desert and shipped here and there in the West, residing briefly in secret laboratories of various acronymic institutions where each uncovers a little more of its mystery. Eventually a great American physicist, Alan Stern, is persuaded to take it under his wing.

A facility, otherwise known as "the defense plant," is built on a slice of land procured from local Ojibways in Northern Michigan near the resort town of Two Rivers, and Alan Stern heads up the project. No local knows anything at all about the place.

One night a great explosion takes place at the facility, and the next morning Two Rivers has simultaneously gone completely missing from the United States of America, and a foreign village has magically appeared in the deep forest of Mille Lacs in the northern New West.

Wilson's management of the slowly accumulating knowledge of the people of Two Rivers as they struggle to grasp their radically new situation is very adroitly done and full of suspense and shocks. The arrival in the town of the people of the dystopic world into which the experiments at the facility have thrust them is convincing and increasingly ominous. The attempts of the Two River folk to come to terms with, and then to combat, these aliens escalates in an exciting and highly satisfactory manner.

To me one of the best aspects of the book is the strange relationship between Howard Poole and his uncle, Alan Stern. Howard arrived at Two Rivers the very day before the explosion. He had grown up to become a scientist mainly because of his uncle's example and was to work with Stern on the mysterious project underfoot, but, because of the explosion, he is mostly ignorant of what that project was. From excited hints his uncle gave him and from his search for clues to explain Two Rivers' present situation, he is thrown back to early memories of his distinguished relative. Weird events taking place in the town and the nature of the theocracy which holds sway on the world the town now finds itself part of call to mind Stern's fascination with the mystical writings and fabulous imagings associated with Gnosticism.

A running motif is Poole's recollection of conversations held with his uncle from Howard's childhood on. One of them distills as neatly and frighteningly as I have ever seen it done what has always struck me as being perhaps the most dangerous notions of Western science.

Just in case you don't read the book, and that would be a pity because I think you might enjoy it, I'd like to quote the passage which does it:

"One summer on a beach in Atlantic City,

Continued on page 34



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BY ERIC NIDEROST

Native Americans are central in two of three new fantasy films.

THIS YEAR IS PROVING A BANNER ONE FOR GENRE FANTASY FILMS. COLUMBIA'S *FIRST Knight* heads the list in the live-action category, a big budget Arthurian tale that stars Sean Connery as the mythic king and Richard Gere as Sir Lancelot.

But *First Knight* isn't the only fantasy that will compete for box office dollars this summer and fall. *Pocahontas*, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, and *A Kid in King Arthur's Court* will also be released this year. In some ways, they are a disparate bunch of films, differing in time, plot, and overall mood. One is an animated feature, the others are live action. But they all have themes dealing with learning and helping others, and the ability to change.

A Kid in King Arthur's Court has a pedigree that reaches back into the nineteenth century. When famed author, lecturer, and humorist Mark Twain penned *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* in 1889, he meant it as a gentle satire on the Arthurian legends. Ever the gadfly, Twain delighted in deflating romantic myths.

Little did Twain know his story would inspire so many screen incarnations. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was first lensed in 1920, but the first sound version of the story was released in 1931, featuring the famous American humorist Will Rogers as "Sir Boss," a twentieth century Yankee who is transported back to the days of King Arthur.

The best known version of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* is Paramount's 1949 release. Essentially a Bing Crosby vehicle, the movie was part satire, part comedy, and part excuse for Bing's vocalizations. The movie is noted for its stunning Technicolor sets and titian-haired newcomer Rhonda Fleming.

A Kid in King Arthur's Court borrows elements from the previous films, but the emphasis is on straight comedy, with elements of adventure. Disney is producing the film, and as the title suggests, the target audience is young adult, since the hero is fourteen. Preteens will probably respond to the fantasy-adventure elements.

The plot details a time when Merlin decides to go to the future to "summon a brave knight from across the ages" to save Camelot. Apparently, he can't find any contemporary warrior who will suit his needs. But for all his powers, Merlin doesn't realize that the knightly trade is largely an anachronism in the '90s.

The magician's choice falls on Calvin Fuller, a fourteen-year-old kid from California. Calvin belongs to a Little League team called the Knights, and for Merlin, it's any portcullus in a storm. The young man soon finds himself back in the sixth century, grappling with problems he didn't know existed.

Billed as a "contemporary comedy," *Kid* has Calvin rescuing Camelot from the machinations of Lord Belasco, a kind of low-rent Modred. The young time traveler also restores King Arthur's faith in himself. In helping the king, Calvin learns to help himself. He's soon transformed from a self-conscious teen to a self-confident young adult.

Paramount's *The Indian in the Cupboard* takes an entirely different tack, though learning about yourself and others is a theme it shares with the other picture. *Cupboard* was directed by Frank (*Dark Crystal*) Oz, best known for his collaboration with *Muppets* creator Jim Henson. The screenplay was penned by Melissa Matheson, who was Oscar-nominated for her *E.T.—The Extra-Terrestrial* script.

The movie is based on an award-winning children's book by Lynne Reid Banks, so it seemed to be a natural for translation to celluloid. The film's co-producer is Kathleen Kennedy, who was long associated with director Steven Spielberg and his many projects.

Kennedy felt that *Cupboard's* story had an attraction for all ages. "There are so few stories," she details, "that appeal to the child in all of us. *The Indian in the Cupboard*, with its grand themes, is just such a story."

As the movie unfolds, a boy named Omri gets a number of gifts for his ninth birthday, including a wooden

Continued on page 23



Paramount's The Indian in the Cupboard *appeals to the child in all of us. I know I had a shelf full of animals that came to life while I slept.*

Nature, Music and Magic

by Don Maitz and Janny Wurts



An Introduction to the Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium

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Michael Whelan's



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In the art world, original lithographs can regularly issue for thousands of dollars. Wildlife collectors are eager to invest thousands of dollars for an original lithograph by one of many noted artists.

I chose to participate in the **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** for three reasons: my admiration for the work of Michael Whelan, one of my favorite artists; I like the concept of participating in a collectors group commissioning artwork and promoting fantasy artists; and, I believe that the **Passage To Sanctuary** series represents an excellent bargain when compared to limited edition prints offered in the field.

— *Tim Corbett*
The Fantasy Gallery

Michael Whelan accepted the challenge of being our first artist. He was chosen because of his outstanding talent and technical excellence in the fantasy field. Michael has received the Hugo Award as Best Professional Artist for eleven of the past fourteen years and is a three time winner of the World Fantasy Award as Best Artist. In addition, his original illustrations have received top awards in art exhibitions throughout the world. In 1992, Michael received the SuperHugo award as the Best Professional Artist of the past 50 years!

I have a great regard for the artwork of Michael Whelan and will back any project of his to the hilt. He's one of the greats in science fiction. I know that he has been waiting a long time for a project like this and I'm glad to help bring it to fruition.

— *Anne McCaffrey*

Michael Whelan's work has been displayed at museums and galleries throughout the world. Included are the Delaware Art Museum, the Butler Institute of American Art, New York's Hayden Planetarium and Society of Illustrators, Chicago's Brandywine Fantasy Gallery, and the Greenwich Workshop Gallery (publisher of Dinotopia). He is currently planning a national tour to exhibit the original works from **Scenes / Visions: The Art of Michael Whelan**.

Michael Whelan has released **Landing**, the third original lithograph in his **Passage to Sanctuary** series. Each lithograph is signed and numbered by Michael Whelan; when purchased as a set, all three original lithographs bear the same signature number. The complete **Passage to Sanctuary** series is available now.

Members of the **Consortium** have chosen to commission Don Maitz and Janny Wurts for their next three original lithographs.

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Janny is the best-selling author of the **Empire** series (with Raymond E. Feist), the **Cycle of Fire Trilogy**, and most recently, **Curse of the Mistwraith** and **Ships of Merior** of her series, The Wars of Light and Shadow. A World Fantasy Award-winning illustrator, Janny s science fiction and fantasy paintings have been reproduced for paperback books and greeting cards by major publishers worldwide.

For our proposed collaborative effort, a first for us, we decided to pursue the symbolic relationship of threes. Earth, light, and sound with connection to mysticism, the elements, wildlife, and music. Since we are two minds working in concert, we felt a knotwork theme should be subtly incorporated into the three images, and that all three paintings should interrelate, both in theme, and as a set to be set hung together, though each image would stand on its own merits as a separate work of art.

— *Don and Janny*

Their trio of themes will encompass dawn, midday, and dusk; the three earthly elements water, earth, and air through the imagery of ocean, trees, and sky. Three categories of wildlife as in fish, forest creatures, and winged birds. Three types of sound as in flute, stringed instruments, and percussion wind chimes. The magic, the mysticism, the sense of the unseen in nature, and the knotwork would be threads and a journey in imagination running through each painting.

How You Can Join the Consortium

The **Fantasy 500 Collectors Consortium** is now accepting applications for new members. Membership has never been easier or more rewarding.

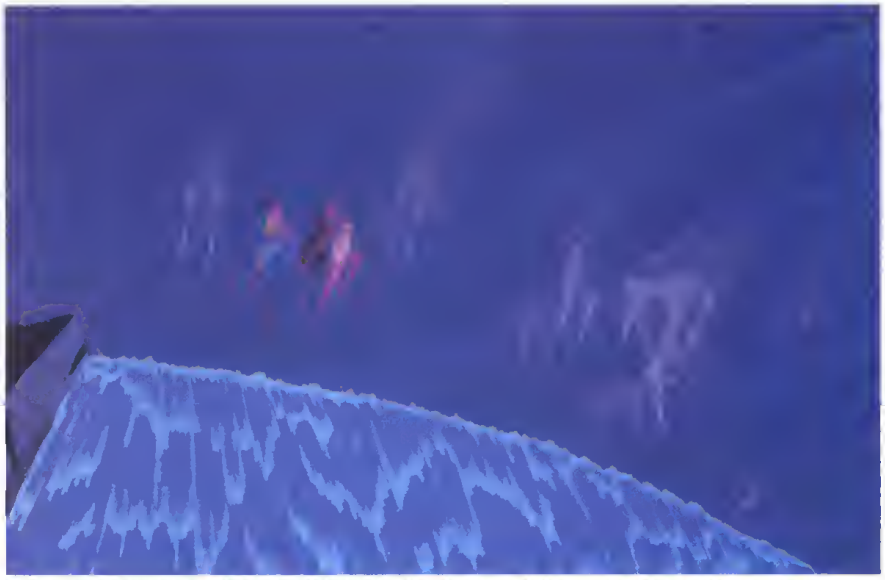
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You may also join the **Consortium** by ordering Michael Whelan's **Passage to Sanctuary**. For more information, or to order either series, please contact Membership Director David Mogul at (404) 662-7574.



Disney's Pocahontas and John Smith listen to their hearts and the spirits of the earth in order to communicate. Every Native American tribe believed that all creatures, not just humans, possessed spirits or souls. In some tribes, "soul" extended to even such inanimate objects as water or rocks.

cupboard and a three-inch-high plastic toy Indian. Nobody knows where the cupboard came from; Omri's brother found it in an alley. The little toy Indian is special to Omri because it was given to him by his best friend, Patrick.

Omri discovers the cupboard has some magical properties, because when he places the Indian in the cupboard and turns the key, it is suddenly transformed into a live, full-scale Native American by the name of Little Bear. He tries to keep Little Bear a secret from his parents and two brothers, for fear they might take the Indian away. His friend Patrick is only person who knows about the cupboard's magical properties.

Things get complicated when a plastic toy cowboy is placed in the cupboard. The little cowboy also comes to life full-scale, and his values are decidedly different than Little Bear's. The cowpoke, whose name is Boone, is described as an "ornery" cuss, who exposes Omri to a whole different set of values. When the toy cowboy and Indian come to life, they also conjure up the Old West. Omri and his friend Patrick learn about other cultures and other values, and they also learn about taking responsibility for their own actions.

The title role of the Indian is essayed by Litefoot, a Cherokee who is claimed to be the first Native American rapper. His musical inclinations nothwithstanding, Litefoot decided to try his hand at acting. Omri is played by Hal Scardino, who is making his starring debut after playing a young chess champion in *Searching for Bobby Fisher*. A young newcomer, Rishi Bhar, was tapped to play the role of Omri's best friend Patrick.

Pocahontas, the other film in question, is Disney's 33rd full-length animated feature. The movie is a radical departure from the usual Disney subject matter. For the first time, a storyline will be based on actual characters and events in American history rather than some original fantasy or adaptation of a classic myth or fable.

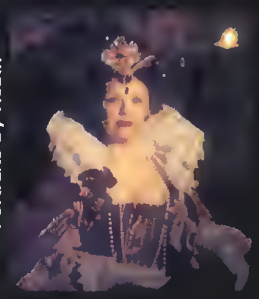
The title character is a young Native American woman, Chief Powhatan's daughter. Set in the seventeenth century, it tells the tale of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. Its basic theme is the interaction between two cultures, English European and Native American, and its main focus is the star-crossed love of Pocahontas and a young English adventurer, John Smith.

But why Pocahontas? Why not a story based on, say, the American Civil War, which has thousands of buffs and reenactors across the country? Save perhaps for the people in those states where the events actually occurred, the average American has little interest in early colonial Americana. According to *Pocahontas* head of story Tom Sito, Pocahontas was chosen "because we've explored the fantasy realm—like the classic fairy tales—to such an extent, we're running out of material."

Sito's appointment as head of story was a good choice; a talented artist, he also brought to the project a genuine love of history, as evidenced by his large home library. Sito is a Disney veteran, whose resume includes such features as *Beauty and the Beast* and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. In conversation, Sito leavens his comments with a well-honed sense of humor. As story head, Sito was responsible for storyboarding the film. "I had about ten artists under me," Sito recalls. "Storyboarding is essentially the first visualizations of the script. We do a kind of continuity comic book of the picture, and by looking at the boards, we can see the flow of the film, and maybe spot slow patches or story problems."

The Pocahontas character (voiced by Native American actress Irene Bedard) is the film's prime mover; much of the plot revolves around her. Some liberties were

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taken with history; when Pocahontas first met John Smith, she was about twelve years old. Though Disney films are generally thought of as catering to the preteen market, *Pocahontas* transforms her into a beautiful young woman of about twenty. Sito explains Pocahontas was made older "because it would have greater audience appeal. Rather a young romance—a kind of 'Romeo and Juliet'—than a father and daughter relationship."

But while the original premise was a kind of Romeo and Juliet in the forest, the artist maintains, "We had to lay a lot of pipe. That's story slang for setting up the whole premise. We had to establish the Indians, and establish that there were Englishmen who sailed to America. They didn't like each other."

Because the film was based on real history, the accent was on authenticity—at least to a point. "Pochahontas' features are a bit like Irene Bedard's," confides Sito, "but they're also based on Alice Littledove, a direct descendant of Pocahontas. We also used elements of a seventeenth century portrait done from life."

The popular image of Indians, based in part on numerous books, movies, and television, is that of the Plains tribes of the mid-nineteenth century. Saying "Indian" or "Native American" conjures up an image of feather warbonneted warriors hunting buffalo and living in tepees.

But the eastern woodland tribes had different lifestyles, and they did not even look like their Plains counterparts. "In the beginning," laughs Sito, "there were producers of the film who would say, 'Where's the tepees?'"

There were at least three research trips to Virginia, where the Jamestown Foundation and other authorities were consulted. Present-day descendants of the Powhatan Confederation, including the Pamunkey tribe, were also consulted. All this was done because "audiences are more savy to historical details than they used to be. We reviewed films of the '50s, and they were awful! The Indians looked silly in Plains warbonnets, etc., for eastern tribes. In our film, costumes, hairstyles, huts, and even canoes are authentic."

Of course, this film is produced by Disney, not *National Geographic* or *Playboy*. So while in real life, Powhantan women went topless, with just a deerskin apron that covered the front lower halves of their bodies, Pocahontas does not reveal any of her charms. But she does sport an authentic tattoo on her arm. "I wanted to have more tattoos, especially facial tattoos on some of the incidental Indian characters, but twentieth century notions of beauty got in the way."

Sito did his best to be authentic, but adds with tongue firmly in cheek, "Virginia Indians didn't sing Broadway tunes, so what the heck!"

Pocahontas touches the realm of myth and fantasy with Grandmother Willow, a 400-year-old spirit who resides in a gnarled tree. Her "bark," however, is much worse than her "bite," and she gives good guidance to the young Native American woman. Grandmother Willow (voiced by actress Linda Hunt) is very much in keeping with traditional Native American beliefs. Virtually every tribe believed that all creatures, not just humans, possessed spirits or souls. In some tribes, "soul" extended to even such inanimate objects as water or rocks.

"We had a couple of ideas," Sito concedes, "that didn't work. We thought of a star mother, or of the wind as a physical character in itself. We kicked around a number of ideas but came up with the Native American belief that trees, even whole forests, are imbued with spirits. "Grandmother Willow," adds Sito with a chuckle, "is Pochahontas' analyst, a kind of juvenile counselor! She guides her though her confusion, and tells her to follow her heart."

The tree spirit was instrumental, at least indirectly, in solving one of the picture's thorniest problems—the language barrier.

"When Pocahontas and Smith first meet," explains Sito, they don't understand each other. We use real Indian language at this point; Pocahontas says, 'Who are you? Stay away from me!' in Algonkian. Basically, we looked at other movies, like *Dances with Wolves* and *The Hunt for Red October*, films that bounce back and forth between languages. We wanted to find a technique that doesn't intrude on the narrative.

"As I've said, at first they can't understand each other. But Pocahontas recalls Grandmother Willow telling her to listen to her heart and to the spirits of the earth. A revelatory wave of leaves blows over her, and she finds she can communicate with Smith."

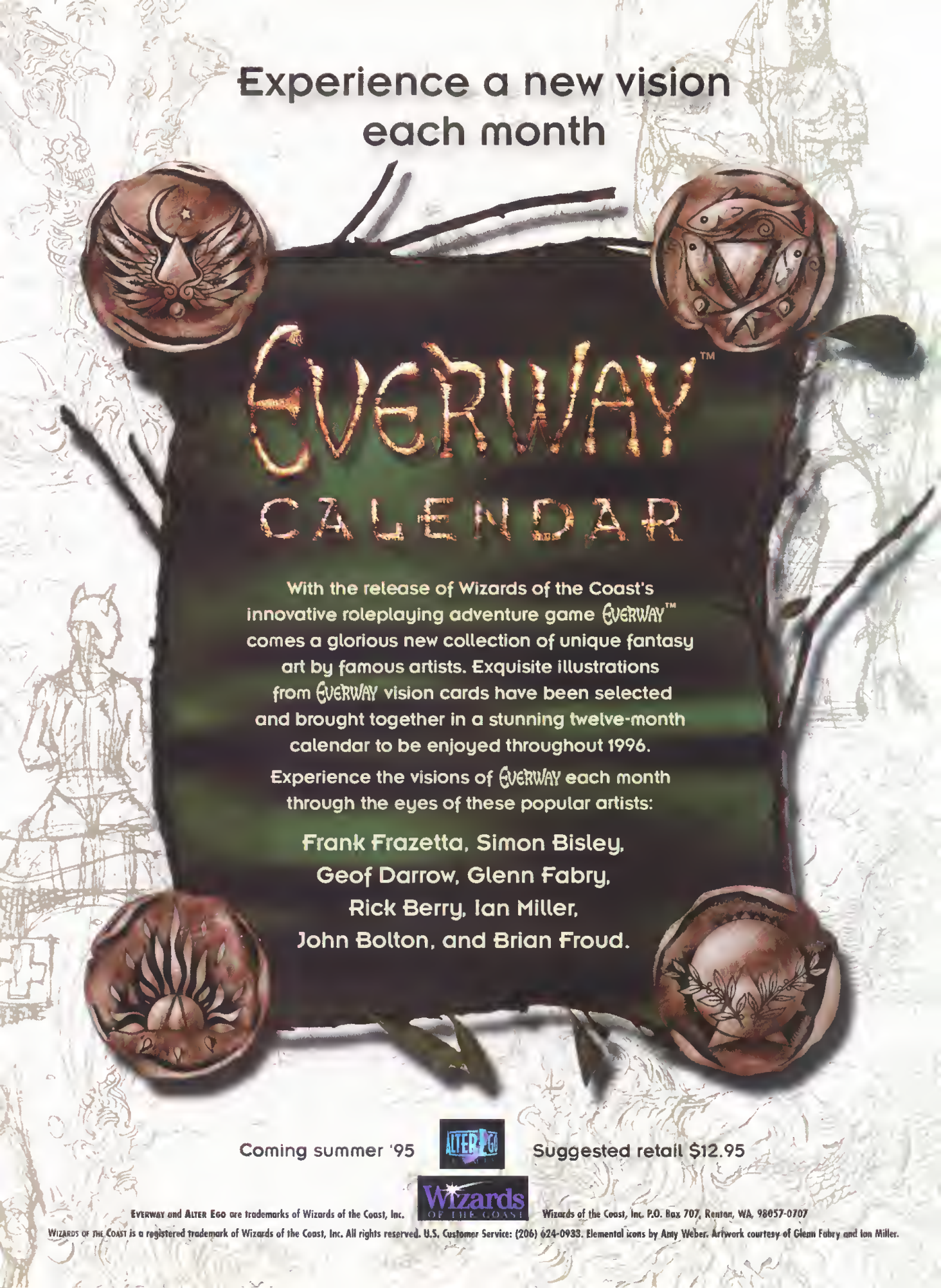
On a lighter note, Sito recalls that when Animation division head Roy Disney and Disney studio head Michael Eisner asked why the Indians speak such perfect English, "we said the Native Americans were Hooked on Phonics!"

Sito maintains that the hardest part for the filmmakers was the fact that the story doesn't have a conventional happy ending. "We had to explain," Sito says,"that ending. Smith goes back to England, and Pocahontas stays in Virginia. We had to make it obvious why she couldn't get on the boat and go back with him, or why he didn't stay in Virginia."

Summing up, Sito characterizes *Pocahontas* as a "Romeo and Juliet kind of story between an Englishman and an Indian maiden. But beyond that, the movie exposes a wider audience to Native American beliefs, such as an appreciation of the land. It also has a message that we should get along with people who are different, who are not like us."

In *Pocahontas*, *The Indian in the Cupboard*, and *A Kid in King Arthur's Court*, the characters grow and develop by helping and interacting with others. It's not a bad theme for the strife-plagued '90s. ❧

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BY TERRI WINDLING

The heroes' quest: The transformational power of fairy tales.

MANY SCHOLARS OVER THE LAST CENTURY HAVE ATTEMPTED TO DEFINE WHY FAIRY tales and fantastical myths can be found in the oldest storytelling traditions of virtually every culture around the globe. Some scholars view magical tales as pre-scientific attempts to explain the workings of the universe; others see in them remnants of pagan religions or tribal initiation rites; still others dissect them for symbolic portrayals of feminist or class history. The most fascinating thing about fairy tales is that there is some truth in all these different views. There are many ways to interpret the old tales, whether as allegory or metaphor, as art or simple entertainment. No single deconstruction of a fairy tale is "correct," no single version of a tale is the "true" one. The old tales exist in myriad forms, changing and adapting from culture to culture, from generation to generation. Like the wizards who roam through enchanted woods, the tales themselves are shape-shifters: elusive, mysterious, mutable, capable of wearing many different forms. This fact is at the core of their power, and is the source of their longevity. It is also what makes them such useful tools to the modern writer of fantasy fiction.

"A true fairy tale is, to my mind, very like the sonata," said the nineteenth century fantasy writer George McDonald. "If two or three men sat down to each write what the sonata meant to him, what approximation to definite idea would result? A fairy tale, a sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, each seizes you and sweeps you away. The law of each is in the mind of its composer; that law makes one man feel this way, another man feel that way. To one the sonata is a world of odour and beauty, to another soothing only and sweetness. To one the cloudy rendezvous is a wild dance, with terror at its heart; to another a majestic march of heavenly hosts, with Truth at their center pointing their course but as yet restraining her voice. Nature is mood-engendering, thought-provoking; such ought the sonata, the fairy tale to be."

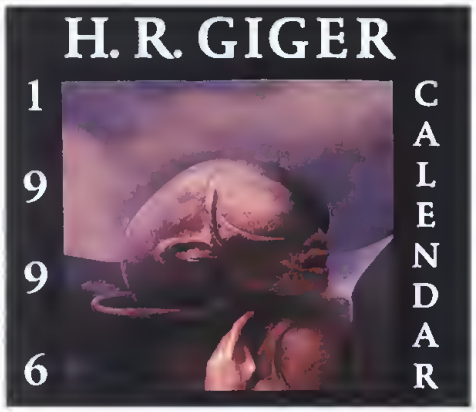
J.R.R. Tolkien compared fairy tales to the bones from which a savory broth is extracted. Each storyteller dips his or her ladle into that bubbling cauldron of soup, and then uses it as the base of a dish individually spiced and flavored. The soup has been simmering for centuries—there are no cooks we can credit as the originators of the first fairy tales; there is no single version of each tale we can point to as "definitive." At best, we can point to the authors of distinctive variations on old, common themes: Charles Perrault's French *Cinderella* is the "ash girl" tale we know best today; Hans Christian Andersen's Danish *Little Mermaid* is the best known of the undine [female water spirit] legends; the Grimms Brothers' chaste German rendition of *Sleeping Beauty* is the one found in modern fairy tale books (as opposed to much older versions in which the slumbering princess is impregnated by a passing prince, and does not awaken until the birth of her twins).

Each of these well-known fairy tales is based upon themes that are universal. The earliest known versions of *Cinderella*, for instance, date back to ancient China; one finds her in the Middle East, in Africa, and even here in North America (in such stories as *The Rough-Faced Girl* told by the Algonquin tribe). While the flavor of each tale might change according to the culture, the times, and the teller, the core of the tale remains the same—because at their core, these are stories that speak of the most basic elements of the human condition: fear, courage, greed, generosity, cruelty, compassion, failure, and triumph. As a result, their themes are as relevant today as they were back in centuries past.

Fairy tales generally take the form of a quest: the hero is torn from hearth and home and set on a strange, unpredictable road, where a trial must be endured, a riddle solved, a monster overcome, a future claimed. By the

Tales were passed down through the generations by word of mouth—using archetypes as a mirror held to daily life. Art by Kay Nielsen.





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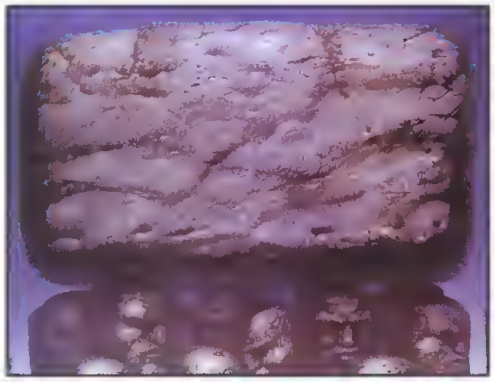


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time of the quest's completion, something or someone has been transformed: most often the heroes themselves. Modern fantasy fiction—with its roots deep in fairy tales, myth, and romance—also often takes the form of the quest: J.R.R. Tolkien's Frodo, Ursula Le Guin's Ged, John Crowley's Smokey and Auberon, and Patricia McKillip's young Riddlemaster of Hed all undergo rites of initiation and transformation—and, in the process, effect the transformation of the worlds in which they live. As in the powerful old fairy tales (as opposed to the bland, modern Disney versions), the journeys are difficult, harrowing ones; happy endings are never guaranteed; and success does not come without a price.

The fantasy quest is dangerous, Ursula Le Guin warns us in "Dreams Must Explain Themselves" (an essay on the art of fantasy fiction, to be found in her book *The Language of the Night*—a title I recommend to all aspiring fantasy writers). Fantasy, she says, is "not antirational, but pararational; not realistic but surrealistic, a heightening of reality. In Freud's terminology, it employs primary not secondary process thinking. It employs archetypes which, as Jung warned us, are dangerous things. Fantasy is nearer to poetry, to mysticism, and to insanity than naturalistic fiction is. It is a wilderness, and those who go there should not feel too safe.... A fantasy is a journey. It is a journey into the subconscious mind, just as psychoanalysis is. Like psychoanalysis, it can be dangerous, and *it will change you*."

As Le Guin reminds us, fantasy writers are not the only ones to note the power of magical stories. Jungian psychologists regard the fairy tale quest as symbolic of the inner journey one takes into the lands of the soul. Maria-Louise von Franz, a Jungian scholar, explores folk stories as metaphorical representations of the psychological healing process in fascinating books such as *The Feminine in Fairy Tales*. In the television series *The Power of Myth* (available on video from most public libraries), the great mythologist Joseph Campbell spoke eloquently of the resonance of ancient mythic themes in the rites of modern life. The quest is our life's journey from birth until death, said Campbell; and we must be the hero of that journey: the hero of our own lives.

Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim explored the transformative power of the fantastic in his landmark study *The Uses of Enchantment*, which has become a popular text in the field of children's literature as well as in psychology. The book is flawed by being overly narrow in its definition of fairy tales and their interpretation, but it was nonetheless an important and influential work when it first appeared, for it countered ideas prevalent among educators (and even book editors) in the 1950s and '60s that children are harmed by reading fantasy. Only strict realism, these educators believed, could prepare young minds for the modern world. Bettelheim argued that magical tales also equipped children to deal with real life—by using symbolic, metaphoric language to represent universal truths. It was Bettelheim's contention that many adolescents who escape into the dream worlds of drug abuse or bizarre religious cults were deprived of their sense of wonder in childhood, pressed prematurely into an adult world view.

James Hillerman, a brilliant and iconoclastic thinker, extends the importance of the mythic and fantastic beyond childhood into the successive stages of a full adult life. Hillerman's "archetypal psychology," which makes some radical departures from the mainstream of current psychological/sociological theory, brings classical Greco-Roman pantheonistic myths into a distinctly modern worldview. His ideas are most accessible in *Interviews*, a lively, quirky collection of discussions; and *Cold Blue Fire*, an anthology of excerpts reprinted from the author's collected works.

Poet Robert Bly draws upon Hillerman's ideas in his pop culture bestseller *Iron John*, an examination of men and myth. It is currently fashionable to snicker at Bly and the "mythopoetic" men's movement his book inspired, with its images of white middle class executives drumming and grunting around "Warrior Weekend" fires. Indeed, there is a certain silliness quotient in the pages of *Iron John*; and the book also deserves some of the

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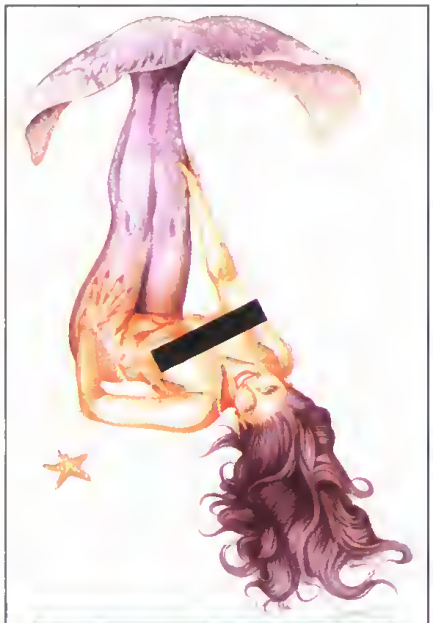
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sharp feminist criticism it has received. Nonetheless, Bly succeeded in introducing a wide mainstream audience to the idea that our heritage of magical tales is not merely an antiquated one, but still relevant—symbolically, poetically—to twentieth century life.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes's subsequent best-seller, *The Women Who Run With the Wolves*, is another book like Bly's that has some fascinating mythic material packaged into an off-puttingly trendy format. Estes's forte is as a storyteller, not a writer, and the thick style of her prose makes cover-to-cover reading of her book difficult. But as a speaker and oral storyteller she is superb; the best way to appreciate her ideas on women's myths is through the audiotapes of her lectures.

Gertrude Mueller Nelson is a writer whose work falls halfway between the pop culture appeal of Bly/Estes at one end of the spectrum, and the incisive Jungian scholarship of Maria-Louise von Franz at the other. *Here All Dwell Free* is an intriguing, highly readable examination of two particular fairy tales: the *Sleeping Beauty* legend and *The Girl With Silver Hands*.

Sleeping Beauty is, of course, a tale we are all familiar with, but *The Girl With Silver Hands*, although less well-known, is an equally haunting story. The Germanic variant is a typical one; the following is a brief account of it. (Look in the Grimms Brothers' collection for a more complete version of the tale.) A poor miller meets the Devil in the woods, who promises him a sack of gold in exchange for what stands behind his mill. The miller agrees, thinking he is only giving away an apple tree—but in fact he has promised his daughter, who stands behind the mill sweeping the yard. The Devil comes to collect the girl, but finds her so pure that he cannot touch her. "Take all water away from her," he instructs the frightened miller, "and I will fetch her when I return." The miller does so, but the girl weeps and washes herself clean with her tears. "Cut off her hands," the Devil instructs, "so she cannot wash herself with them." The miller cuts off his daughter's hands, but the girl still remains clean and pure, and the third time that the Devil returns, he loses all claim to her.

At this point, the girl's parents rejoice and prepare to live the rest of their days in splendor. But the handless girl refuses to be their daughter any longer. "You would have sold me to the Devil himself," she says. "I will make my own way in the world." Her hands bound, her feet bare, she lives like an animal in the wood, starving, unable to feed herself—until she comes to a king's garden, filled with trees dropping pears to the ground. The king's son investigates the nightly theft of the royal fruit, discovers the handless maiden, and brings her into the palace to live. Although she is not whole, she is kind and noble, and soon the prince has fallen in love. He has silver hands made for the girl and marries her.

In many fairy tales, this is where the story would end—but not in this one. The transformation of the hero is not complete, true healing has not occurred. The silver hands give the young woman the mere appearance of wholeness; the hands are useless, and when she gives birth to a child, she cannot care for him. The prince is off at war at this point, and a letter is sent to give him the happy news. But here misfortune strikes again—in the form of the prince's own jealous mother. A false letter is substituted, and the prince is told his wife has given birth to a horrid monster. He writes back to say that nonetheless wife and child must be treated tenderly. Once again, a false letter is substituted, containing instructions to kill the handless bride or cast her out into the woods.

The handless maiden returns to the forest, her baby strapped onto her back. She cannot feed herself, and she cannot feed the child. When she kneels wearily by the river to drink, the baby plunges from its bindings and falls into the water. As she plunges in to save her child, her hands are then restored to her. And an angel leads her to a hut, where mother and child live in solitude. Meanwhile, the prince returns from war and uncovers the whole deception. He plunges into the wood to seek his family, but when he finds his wife at last, he doesn't recognize her—for now she is a healed woman, with two white, graceful hands. Before she will return to the palace, she insists he acknowledge this change in her. Last time, he courted her with his pity; now, he must court her properly. He does so, with pomp and ceremony, and trains of horses laden with gifts. And then their true marriage is sealed, and the story ends happily.

This story of a girl brutally mutilated by a family member (through weakness and carelessness in some versions, through rage and cruelty in others) is one that can be found in oral folklore traditions throughout the world. One finds variants of *The Girl With Silver Hands* in China, Japan, Egypt, Persia, Turkey, North and South America. Italo Calvino recounts a Tuscan version of the tale ("Olive") in his *Italian Folktales*, and notes that other versions can be found in every region throughout Italy. Midori Snyder, a fantasy writer and scholar of African languages, uncovered stark African versions of the tale (titled *The Armless Maiden*) in which the hero's two arms are chopped off because she will not accede to her father's (or else her brother's) sexual demands.

In each case, the girl is violently thrust out of her family background and into the world, where love or marriage alone cannot heal her. Only in solitude does healing come, when her own need demands it, when the time is right, when she is ready to embrace her destiny. It is a disturbing, haunting story—one that has fascinated both Gerturde Mueller Nelson and Marie-Louise von Franz. Yet it is only one of a number of traditional tales with an unflinching portrayal of family violence: *Donkeyskin* is another, with its

frankly incestuous theme of a king determined to marry his own daughter despite her protestations and despair. Hansel and Gretel are abandoned in the woods; the son in the *Juniper Tree* is beheaded; Snow White's lovely mother orders her child's heart cut out, boiled, and served for dinner. In older versions of fairy tales, such acts were not foisted off on "wicked stepparents"; these were the acts of the parents themselves: of kings who are less than wise; and millers who are less than strong; of queens, housewives, and sisters slowly simmering with rage. Today (due to the influence of Disney and Little Golden Books), most people think of fairy tales as simple stories for very young children, in which pretty, passive, feckless girls grow up to marry their rich Prince Charmings. A look at the old traditional tales quickly disabuses us of this notion. The tales were unflinching in their portrayal of the complexities of the human heart. Nor is wickedness relegated to some caricature of Evil, dressed in black. The Devil begins the chain of events that propels the story of *The Girl With Silver Hands*, but the maiden's own weak, frightened father lets him in; the prince's mother continues the Devil's work; and the court stands by as mother and child are thrown back into the forest.

In the universe of fairy tales, the Just often find a way to prevail, the Wicked generally receive their comeuppance. But a close look at the stories reveals much more than a simple formula of abuse and retribution. The trials our heroes encounter in their quests illustrate the process of transformation: from youth to adulthood, from victim to hero, from a maimed state into wholeness, from passivity to action. As centuries of artists have known, this gives fairy tales a particular power: not as a quaint escape from the harsh realities of modern life, but in their symbolic portrayal of all the dark and bright life has to offer. In our modern arts, it has been contemporary poets who have understood this best. Sylvia Plath, Sandra Gilbert, and Olga Broumas have used fairy tale themes to powerful effect to portray the truth of women's lives. Anne Sexton's collection *Transformations*, in which each poem is based on a traditional tale, is an extraordinary work which no lover of fairy tales or fantasy should miss. Gwen Strauss' *Trail of Stones* is a collection of poems that re-examines traditional tales from fresh, shrewd, adult perspectives. Lisel Mueller uses fairy tale themes in many of the gorgeous poems collected in *The Private Life* and *Waving from the Shore*. Jane Yolen's poetry, which has not yet been collected but can be found scattered through a variety of books, magazines, and anthologies, turns fairy tale imagery to diamonds: brilliantly colored, many-faceted, and sharp enough to draw blood.

Like poets, fantasy writers are highly skilled at working with a symbolic language. Robin McKinley's novel, *Deer Skin*, is a powerful reworking of the tales *Donkeyskin* (from

Poetry Contest $24,000 in Prizes

The National Library of Poetry to award 250 total prizes

Owings Mills, Maryland – The National Library of Poetry has just announced that $24,000 in prizes will be awarded over the next 12 months in the North American Open Amateur Poetry Contest. The contest is open to everyone and entry is free.

"We're especially looking for poems from new or unpublished poets," indicated Howard Ely, spokesperson for The National Library of Poetry, "we have a ten year history of awarding large prizes to talented poets who have never before won any type of writing competition."

How To Enter

Anyone may enter the competition simply by sending in one original poem, any subject, any style to:

The National Library of Poetry
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The poem should be no more than 20 lines, and the poet's name and address must appear on the top of the page. "Each poem received will be acknowledged, usually within seven weeks," indicated Mr. Ely.



The Coming of Dawn, featured above, is one of NLP's recent deluxe hardbound anthologies.

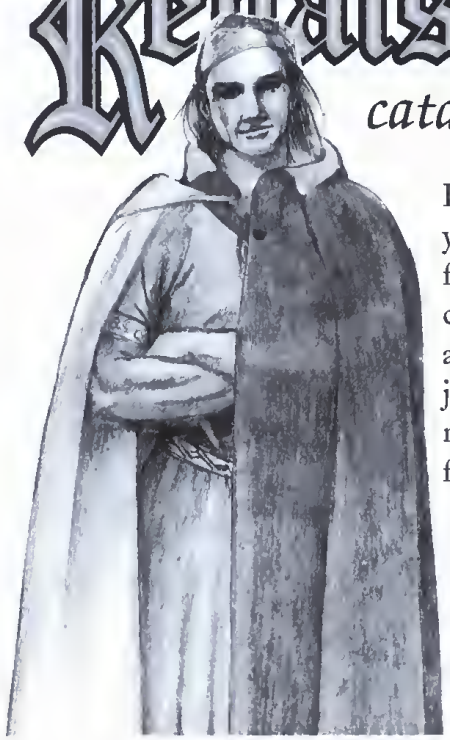
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Many submitted poems will also be considered for inclusion in one of The National Library of Poetry's forthcoming hardbound anthologies. Anthologies published by the organization have included, *On the Threshold of a Dream*, *Days of Future's Past*, and *Of Diamonds and Rust*, among others.

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the French) and *Allerleirauh* (from the German): the story of a king determined to take his own daughter to bed. This is not just a story of horror, but of the transformative process after horror is done. McKinley has woven both dark strands and bright into a moving, magical, even entertaining work; it is set in the lands of Once Upon a Time but has much to say about our own.

Peter Rushford, Lisa Goldstein, and Jane Yolen are three authors who have followed traditional trails to explore the darkest of modern forests: the tragedy of the Holocaust. Rushford's novel *Kindergarten* uses the imagery of Hansel and Gretel to tell the story of a young English boy and his grandmother, a German painter. Goldstein's story "Breadcrumbs and Stones" (found in her collection *Travellers in Magic* and reprinted in the June issue of *Realms of Fantasy*) also uses the Germanic Hansel and Gretel tale to explore the themes of memory, trauma, and storytelling. Yolen's stunning *Briar Rose* works with the Sleeping Beauty legend; it is an unforgettable World War II novel, moving between the past and the present, between America and the camps of Poland.

While I make it my practice not to discuss my own books in this column, I hope you will forgive a brief mention of the recent anthology *The Armless Maiden*, a collection of fairy tale stories, poems, and essays by thirty-three different authors. I would like to make this exception because, leaving aside my own contributions to the book, *The Armless Maiden* contains original works by some of the fantasy field's best authors—works that should be noted by those interested in the transformative aspects of fairy tale themes. (In addition, the book is a charity volume; my own proceeds and that of many of the authors in *The Armless Maiden* have been donated to a crisis center for homeless and abused children.) The works in the book (by Midori Snyder, Tanith Lee, Charles de Lint, Patricia McKillip, Peter Straub, Tappan King, Emma Bull, Ellen Kushner, and Jane Yolen, among others) make use of the unsentimentalized themes of fairy tales to explore the dark side of childhood; the "quest" that leads to maturation and transformation; and the bargains we make to survive.

Old fairy tales have much to say on the subjects of heroism and transformation; about how one finds the courage to fight and prevail against overwhelming odds. I am often asked how one can find the older, adult versions of the tales (as opposed to the modern versions, watered down for children). Just as there is no single "original" version of each tale from which the others have sprung, there is no single source in which to find the oldest stories. You must read French to seek out the forty-one volumes of the *Cabinet des Fees*, set down in the seventeenth century; a fluency in Italian is needed for Straparola's sixteenth century masterpiece *Piacevoli Notti*. But here are a few good places to look for a sampling of classic tales: *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales, Vols. I & II*, edited by Angela Carter; *The Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library: French Fairy Tales*, edited by Jack Zipes; *Italian Folktales*, selected and retold by Italo Calvino; *From the Beast to the Blonde* (a brilliant work of nonfiction on the history of fairy tales) by Marina Warner; and *Touch Magic* (nonfiction on the subject of fairy tales and children's literature) by Jane Yolen.

Why do we continue to be enspelled by fairy tales after all these centuries? Why do we continue to tell the same old tales, over and over again? Because we have all encountered wicked wolves, faced trial by fire, found fairy godmothers. We have all set off into unknown woods at one point in life or another. Poet Lisel Mueller expresses it best in her poem "Why We Tell Stories":

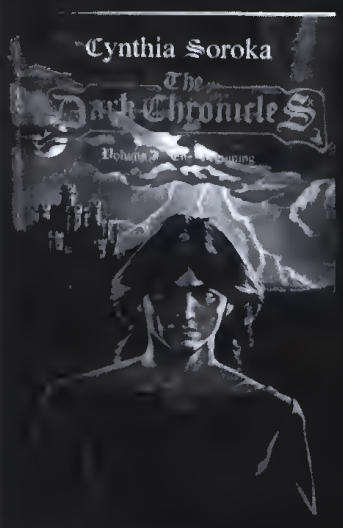
...because we had survived sisters and brothers, daughters and sons, we discovered bones that rose from the dark earth and sang as white birds in the trees

Because the story of our life becomes our life
Because each of us tells the same story but tells it differently
and none of us tells it the same way twice...

Jungians and other scholars have done much to explore the language of fairy tales, and their rich, symbolic imagery. Such imagery can be a useful tool in the hand of modern poets and the writers of the fantastic. The best writers use it wisely and well, to the enrichment of us all. ❧

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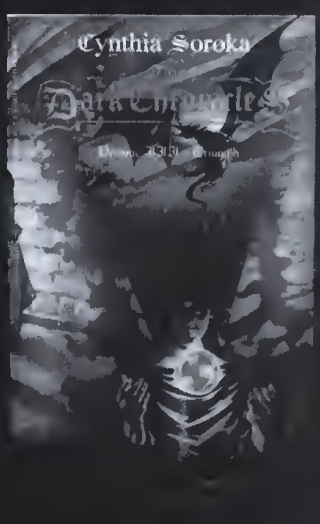
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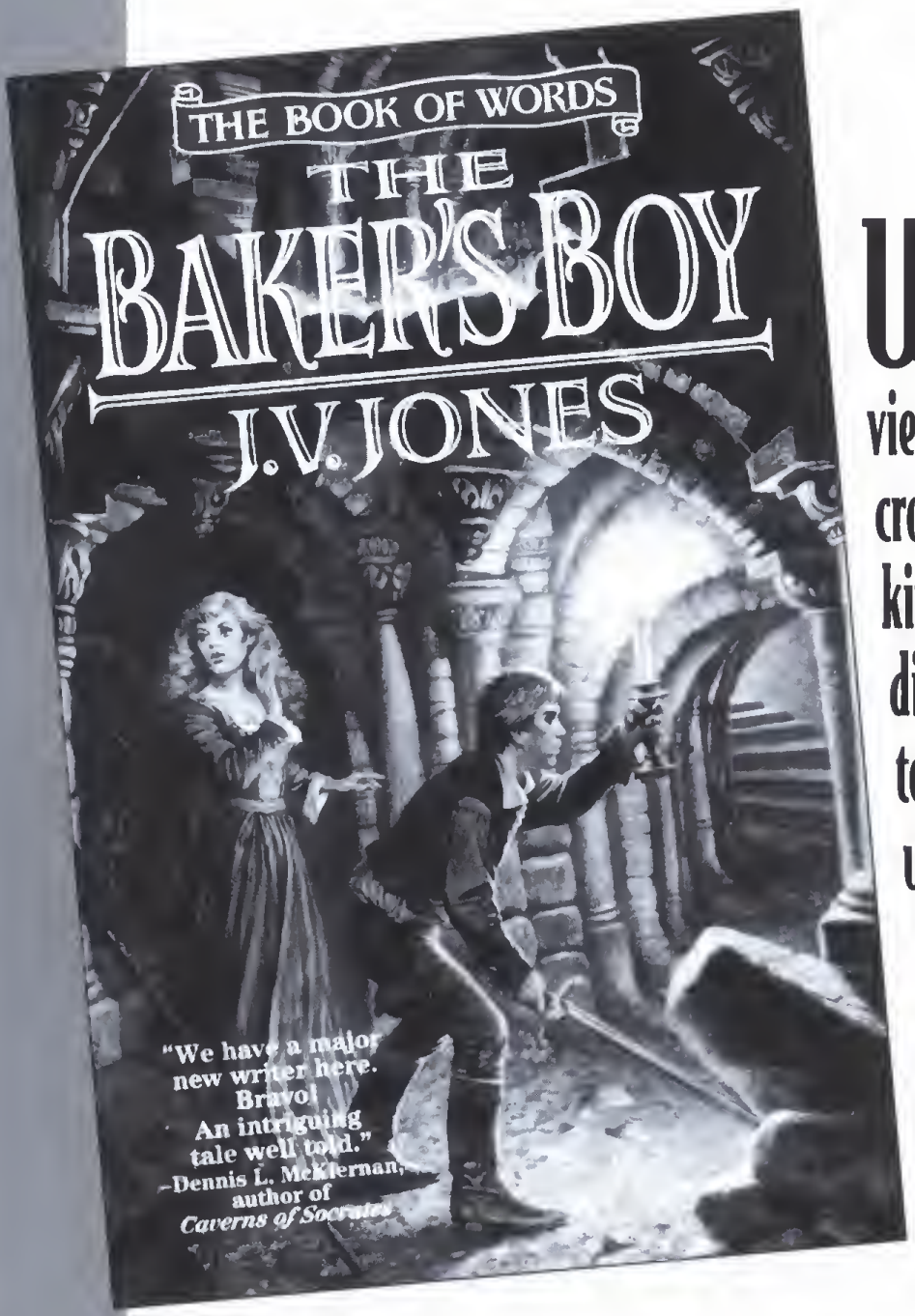
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BOOKS

Continued from page 16

family vacation: Stern picked up a stone and gave it to Howard and said: 'Look at it.'

It was an ancient pebble polished by the sea. Smooth as glass, green as the shadows under the water, shot through with veins of rusty red. The pebble was warm where the sun had been on it. Underneath, it was cool in his hand.

'It's pretty,' Howard had said, idiotically.

Stern shook his head: 'Forget pretty. That's *this* stone. You have to abstract its essence. Learn to hate the *particular*, Howard. Love the general. Don't say "pretty." Look harder. Gypsum, calcite, quartz? Those are the questions you have to ask. Pretty is *maya*. Pretty is the stupid man's answer."

Yes, but he didn't have Stern's razor intellect. He put the stone in his pocket. He liked it. Its particular color. Its coolness, its warmth."

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Gahan Wilson

***The Magnificent Wilf** by Gordon R. Dickson, Baen Books, NY, 3230 pp., hardcover, $21.00.*

Great humorous science fiction must succeed on several levels. First, it should be funny, or at least fun. Second, it should provide us with characters we can care about. Third, it should put these characters in a plot that is both absurdly funny and suspenseful. *The Magnificent Wilf* does all three.

The story follows Tom and Lucy Parent, an average couple with an average Great Dane named Rex, as they are chosen to represent Earth to the other alien races in our sector of the galaxy. I think we all enjoy seeing the average guy, the Jimmy Stewart, reveal that he is actually quite exceptional. And that is what Tom does here. After receiving a special briefing on all the alien races, which teaches him to speak 927 alien languages, he seems quite capable of holding his own against a whole lot of alien intrigue and bureaucracy. His wife, Lucy, also distinguishes herself, saving the galaxy from mountain-sized Extra-Galactics. And dog Rex is no slouch either. Apparently aliens are wowed by our ability to bond with "socialized wolves."

There are a lot of fun moments in the book. An alien named Rejilla probes Tom and Lucy's minds to find out more about humans. In so doing, he inadvertently stimulates their telepathic abilities to the point where, when they wake up in the morning, they can hear the thoughts of their dog, Rex. Rex's thoughts—"I love you. Play frisbee? Fun? Go walk"—are a hoot.

There are hoards of weird-looking aliens with weird-sounding names and some wild galactic rules and red tape. Tom is able to become a Member of the Galactic Sector Council merely by sitting in an empty chair.

And so *The Magnificent Wilf* provides fun, sympathetic characters, and a suspenseful plot. This is a book that you'll probably read in one sitting, with a smile on your face throughout.

Jeanne Cavelos

***Adventures in the Twilight Zone**, edited by Carol Serling (DAW, 336 pp., Paperback, $4.99)*

The Twilight Zone. Hearing these three words immediately triggers vivid memories of the measured voice of Rod Serling or the simple, but impossible-to-forget, four-note theme. Some may remember a particular story from long ago which gripped them for weeks (or kept them up with fear all night). *The Twilight Zone* today remains an enduring program on our television screens and has become part of our language.

Apparently it is also an attractive way to sell books, since more than 130,000 *Twilight Zone* books are currently in print. Each book, edited by Carol Serling, combines one classic tale by Rod Serling with a variety of new short stories with the "Twilight Zone" feeling. *Adventures in the Twilight Zone* is the third volume in this series, with twenty-four stories crammed into its 336 pages.

Can stories written in our time and society still take us to *The Twilight Zone*'s "land of the different, the bizarre, the unexplainable?" The answer, at least in this book, is clearly, "Yes!" All of these tales evoke the eerie, mysterious sense of the original television series, in a wide variety of themes and styles. There is a great deal of witty writing inside *Adventures in the Twilight Zone*, ranging from the frightening specter of J. Neil Schulman's "The Repossessed" (men will be scared to shave the morning after reading it!), to the attention-grabbing humor of M.E. Beckett's "Sorcerer's Mate."

These stories all present unusual changes to the reader—changes in time, space, and/or people. In a number of the tales, the characters are simply human props who exist to propel the idea to its surprising conclusion. However, a few authors managed to do a great deal more within their short stories, presenting us with both gripping ideas *and* people worth caring about.

I was especially impressed by Lois Tilton's "The Shackles of Buried Sins," in which a descendant of slaves learns more than she could ever expect about the experiences of her ancestors, and Rick Wilber's "Hope as an Element of Cold, Dark Matter," with its empathetic portrayal of a teenage girl, her estranged father, and her recently deceased best friend.

So do not despair, lovers of *The Twilight Zone*. Go out, grab this book, settle back, and you will soon encounter ample evidence that the Zone still surrounds us all! And, as you close the book, you might even hear the faint echoes of Rod Serling's voice and the dangling refrain of that four-note theme (*dee-da-dee-dum, dee-da-dee-dum, dee-da-dee-dum...*) ❧

Dan Silver

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Transfusion

BY DEBORAH WHEELER

Illustration by David Beck

The vampiric transformation of the blood and body can trigger a transformation of the soul—for good or ill.

ONCE JACOB ASKED ME IF I dream, and for a long time I did not know how to answer him. I was once a man; should I not still dream like one? The days do not go by in an instant, of that I am sure. I feel each moment, the slow poisonous creeping of the sun. They are not dreams, these visions which come to me. They are memories.

One memory in particular stands out, the night I met Jacob. The night he saved what passes for my life and, in so doing, saved his own.

In those days, the great American cities still struggled against encroaching decay. San Francisco clung to the shards of vanished grandeur while human vermin crawled her alleys. Fault lines, weakened by the nuclear bomb the Celestial Jihad had set off in Los Angeles, shivered and slipped. Hunting, I myself became a victim.



The poor fool had offered *me his blood in the one form that would give me no sustenance. His own death hovered a short time away...*

It took me a week to dig myself free of the tons of cement and steel, each time awaking weaker and closer to despair. When at last I staggered free of the rubble, I saw scavengers picking through the darkened ruins. I wasn't sure I could take one of them. My senses wavered and I could barely stand, yet I must play the game out until the bitter end, following these pitiful creatures until either starvation or dawn finished me.

Starvation almost got me first. After wandering half-witless through one unfamiliar neighborhood after another, I collapsed behind a building where lights still burned in the few unshattered windows. My fingers curled around a chunk of broken concrete, and then, for the first time in three centuries, I truly lost consciousness.

MY FIRST AWARENESS WAS THAT I HAD BEEN MOVED SOMEWHERE indoors. The time was later that same night. I felt a surge of patchy artificial energy. It overrode my hunger like a stimulant drug. I would need to act quickly, before it faded.

I sat up, taking in the kerosene-lit room. Beneath me lay threadbare carpet, beside me a low pallet—a pile of blankets and crumbling foam pads—and there, a man almost as pale as I. Connecting us was a length of clear surgical tubing, broken only by a central valve. I traced the tubing from one needle—in his vein—to the other—in mine. The valve, I noted, was open in my direction.

My mind began to work by fits and starts, unraveling the message of my eyes. This young, aesthetic-looking stranger, with his hooked nose and tapering scholar's fingers, had thought to save my life by transfusing me. He must have mistaken my coloring for anemia.

The poor fool had offered me his blood in the one form that would give me no sustenance. His own death hovered a short time away, not just from his meaningless sacrifice but from some wrongness in his body, the lingering taint of some chemical pollutant. In retribution for his charity, I would consign him to the longer, more painful death.

Moving carefully, though there was scant chance of awakening my nameless savior, I reversed the valve. I watched our blended blood flow back into him. For a moment, I thought of feeding, for hunger now shrieked through every cell of my body.

But no, I would let him live and in living, die.

Yet even as I turned away from him, ready to plunge back into the night, I scented a tempering of the poison. I told myself a portion of my own blood now ran in him, even as his ran in me. I told myself it did not matter.

FORTY YEARS LATER, AUTUMN TWILIGHT SETTLED ON THE MENDOcino hills, ridge after ridge stretching into the distance like the backs of grazing sheep. A last breath of heat shimmered up from the crusted soil, and a hunting owl soared noiselessly on the shifting thermal currents.

Breathing heavily, Jacob Rosenberg clambered to the vantage point from which he could look across the valley. He put down his walking stick and lowered himself to a flat stone. Below him, the town lay hidden behind a shoulder of hill, the fields of ripening grain now faded to golden-gray.

Moving carefully, for the stone, although smooth, was unforgiving, he took off his spectacles and ran his hands over his wiry white beard, massaging the indentations on the bridge of his nose. The world blurred, unknowable. He took a hand-sewn *yarmulke* from his pocket, placed it on his head, and composed himself for prayer. He did not own a *siddur*, a prayer book. It, along with his father's fringed *tallis*, had perished four decades ago in the nuclear ashes of Los Angeles. He had only his memories to guide him now.

As Jacob's thoughts quieted, he closed his eyes, feeling the faint chill that heralded the season's change. He found himself thinking of the observances of his childhood—the songs, the stories, the long discussions of his father's favorite passages from Hillel and Maimonides, all tinged with the sense of delicious mystery. Soon the High Holy Days would be upon him, the Days of Awe. He would set aside a time for reflection, for putting his life in order for the new year, for examining the wrongs he had done and making restitution where he could. The valley people would not understand if he asked their forgiveness, for what had he ever done to harm them, he who'd cured their children of pneumonia and bloodrot and fevers?

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam....

Words came softly from his mouth, half-remembered prayers. The ancient syllables lingered in the air. He rocked back and forth with their rhythm, wondering if anywhere else in the world, some other of his scattered people were doing the same. At moments like these, he wished there might be, just once, other voices raised with his, the community of a *minyan*. That there might be someone to say *Kaddish* for him when he died.

He pulled himself to his feet, joints and muscles protesting. The last of the day had fled while he'd sat meditating. As he started down the path, the beam of his flashlight wavered. He caught the ghostly pattern of grass and rock, hardly distinguishable from one another. His heart beat raggedly. He caught his foot on a stone and stumbled, struggling to catch himself.

Suddenly, the earth fell away beneath him. One hip slammed against something hard. Darkness rushed past, battering his senses. His flailing hands met branches, thin and dry. He grasped at them and they broke away in his fingers. Then his body came to a jarring halt at the bottom of a gully.

Jacob lay on the rocky ground, one leg twisted under him, hands sprawled outward. His first thought as he blinked up at the emerging stars was amazement that he was still alive.

Years ago, when there had still been libraries, he'd read a story of an old man, an American Indian, who'd gone out into the snowy forest, built a fire, and sat with his back against a tree just out of the circle of its warmth. At the time he'd read the story, Jacob had been young and filled with passion. How could a man choose death? he'd stormed. How could a man not struggle against it, in all its protean forms—microbe and mob and tainted rain? How could he just sit there while the light died and the heat seeped from

his body into the endless night? How? How?

This night, it comes for me?

Gradually his heartbeat slowed and his breath came freely instead of catching in his chest. His thoughts seemed unusually lucid. He had gone to the hilltop for evening prayers, he had stayed too long, and in the darkness strayed from the trail and fallen. A man of his years should rightly have broken his neck. But something had preserved him from his own folly, to arrive at this moment of wonder.

Above him, the dark outlines of the sides of the gully melted away. The sky opened up, and his vision came suddenly clear. Stars swirled overhead in milky splendor, sweeping all the heavens with their brilliance. Lying cradled by the earth, Jacob felt as if he could see forever. The radiance that filled his eyes had left those stars hundreds, even millions of years ago. He was witnessing the universe of Moses and of Abraham, the times of miracles and deliverance, still going on, not in the unimaginable past, but this very moment.

Then the moment passed. His left knee, bent under him, twinged. Carefully he straightened it, visualizing the ligaments and tendons that might be torn, the age-brittle cartilages that might be damaged, all the injuries that he'd seen and treated over the years. The joint creaked and smarted, then his kneecap gave a resounding *pop!* as it settled back into place. The knee felt sound enough, even when he crawled to his feet and took a few experimental steps.

His hands were empty, the flashlight and walking stick gone. The *yarmulke* had flown off his head during his tumble. He ran his hands over the ground but could not find his spectacles.

Since there was nothing else to do, no possible way he could climb out of the gully in the darkness, he sat down, made himself as comfortable as possible, and turned his thoughts to what had happened to him, to that moment of awe. He didn't expect to recapture it, only to remember that it had indeed happened and in that remembering to hold at bay the question that would not go away.

This night, it comes for me?

I DO NOT KNOW WHY I WENT BACK THE NEXT NIGHT, BACK TO THE hospital loading deck where Jacob had found me. But I waited there, deep in the shadows cast by the yellowed lights, tasting the despair, the grime and crusted filth, searching for that faint whiff of sweetness, the last scent I had of him.

At the emergency entrance, men with jumpy eyes greeted me with submachine guns. I paused, for what could I say to them? What reason could I give for my presence there? No hospital could give me healing, nor any priest grant me absolution.

Wordless, I melted back into the night to wait the long hours until I felt a shifting in the pall of death. At the staff entrance, I caught sight of a figure, slight and stoop-chested. Myopic, shambling. Anything but heroic.

I knew him as I knew the silence of my own heart. But he no longer reeked of pollution and slow decay. Something sang like music in his blood. I followed it, powerless to turn away, knowing all the while it was not thirst that drew me, but a feeling so disused and forgotten that I no longer knew what it was.

NIGHT CHILL SEEPED INTO JACOB'S BONES, SHARPER THAN HE'D expected. He drew his coat more tightly around his shoulders and wished he had a hat.

A lump of darkness appeared along the top of the gully, for a moment as still as the rocky ground before it disappeared. The next instant, Jacob sensed a figure standing beside him, substance but no trace of warmth. Against the night's blackness, he caught the blurred paleness of teeth.

Fingers smooth as marble curled around his arm, chill even through his coat sleeve. "You were not in the cabin when I woke," a soft voice said. "I thought you might have gone down to the village, but you were not there, either."

"Thank you, Victor." Jacob accepted his spectacles, slightly more battered than before. "You've been to the village and back? Already?"

"It is two hours past midnight."

So late? How long had he lain there, enraptured by the stars? How long had they been waiting for him to truly see them? Years? Centuries?

They reached the trail and climbed out of the shadowed gully. Jacob's chest tightened, squeezing the breath from his lungs. The grasses no longer looked withered, but touched with silver. The hillsides shimmered with light.

Jacob had built his cabin into the rocky hillside, a single room with table, bed, bookshelves. Fireplace and kitchen area, pump for water. One door led outside, facing east, the other into the deep caves. Victor lit the lantern and hung it on the hook above the table, where he placed the flashlight and *yarmulke*, now covered with dust and bits of dry grass.

Jacob lowered himself to the bench. The pain in his chest had steadily increased during the journey home. Now it subsided, leaving him sweating hard. He had laid out his dinner before he left: a pitcher of water, a sliver of goat cheese, herbed beans and bread, everything covered with a clean, many-patched cloth. Candlesticks stood at the end of the table, unlit.

With the first bite, he felt nauseated. He forced himself to eat a spoonful of beans. It took an effort to chew properly.

Victor moved closer and sat in his usual place on the second bench. Jacob glanced up at the expressionless face and was struck, as he had been so many times over the years, by its beauty—the arched lips, the brows shaped like the wings of soaring gulls, the lines of jaw and cheekbone, the skin as fine as alabaster.

"Stop hovering over me like an old grandmother," Jacob grumbled. "I'm fine."

The perfect face inclined a fraction, lamplight gleaming on the blue-black hair. Even when the light fell on the eyes, they seemed all pupil, all emptiness.

"You are *not* fine, Jacob. Your angina is worse, your cardiac function is compromised. The next infarction will kill you."

Jacob stared at his half-eaten plate of beans. Victor could hear his diseased old heart as it struggled and failed. Could taste the imminence of his death.

"You might have died tonight," Victor said, as Jacob knew he would. "I might have come too late to save you. You stubborn old Jew, do you want that? No? Then why won't you take what I offer? Do you think your god cares if you drink blood—*my* blood—any more than he cares if *I* take a man's blood or a deer's?"

"*I* care," Jacob said quietly. "Blood then is not merely blood, it is the symbol of life. I revere life, I do not consume it. The word *kosher* means—"

"Nothing!" Victor exploded. "Superstitious nothing!"

Jacob shook his head, refusing to be drawn in. Victor was angry at being lectured. "*Nu*, you went looking for me?"

For Victor to go near the town was remarkable in itself. Since he had followed Jacob up to the mountain, he had avoided other human contact.

"A boy is sick," Victor said. "Some pathology in his blood—not a pollutant, not any microbe in your books."

"Which boy?"

A hesitation, a deepening of the stillness. For all the years Jacob had known him, Victor had resisted learning names. At first Jacob thought it was because names bestowed individuality, identity; later, much later, when he knew Victor no longer sought out human prey, the truth came to him. Who could endure the memory of so many names?

"Never mind," Jacob said gently. "I'll go down tomorrow and examine him."

"Be sensible, old man. You're tired, you're bruised from one end to the other, your heart requires rest. It's too strenuous a journey for you."

Jacob lifted his chin. "I have a choice? This child is going to diagnose himself?"

"At least let me carry the heavy things for you."

He would come after dark, of course, and vanish just as quickly. Jacob sighed. "The microscope, then."

"I will not let you go so easily." Victor rose to his feet. Darkness swirled around him like a cloak. He placed his hands on the table

and leaned forward. "Once I would have hunted there, in the village. I would have reveled in their terror. I would have been everything the priests said I was."

On any other night, Jacob would have turned away. Now the brilliance of the heavens lingered behind his vision. Everywhere, darkness gave birth to mystery. When he looked at Victor, this night of all nights, he seemed to be looking into a mirror.

I STAYED HIDDEN FROM JACOB FOR A LONG TIME, MONTHS IN THE city until the next big earthquake and the fires and then years afterward on the road. Hunger and plague stalked the countryside. People turned in an instant from friend to enemy, grateful to savage.

Once I threw a rock through the glassless window of a ranch house where he was sleeping, to warn him. Other times I muddied his tracks or left a half-exposed cache of supplies and a false trail in the other direction. I argued with myself that this was madness, but still I watched.

I never knew why Jacob kept going, nor did I have any notion of what he did or why he did it. Doctoring, to me, was just another kind of priesthood, with its own collection of smells and incantations.

Then one suffocating summer night, Jacob walked down a deserted side street of a little town, medical bag in hand. Following him, keeping to the shadows, I saw the jackals waiting: shaved, tattooed heads, black leather vests, back-sharpened knives. They had guns, too, but wouldn't use them. They wanted to savor this killing.

I took one from behind, breaking his neck with a jerk. A slash and the nearest lay in a spurt of arterial blood.

Jacob turned, his eyes hidden behind twin moons of reflected light.

"Get him!" yelled the tallest, the leader.

The world blurred as I darted in. Air rushed by me, though I had no breath to steal. I spun and lashed out at another hunter with one foot. Hand bones shattered and the knife went spinning in an elongated arc. I backhanded the next across the jaw and his head snapped back, twisting. I heard the *crack!* of his fractured spine. Felt the sudden, exhilarating chill as his heart stuttered and froze.

Three of them left now. The leader raised his hand, aiming the weapon he'd thought hidden. I caught the whiff of machine oil and gunpowder. He screamed, "Bastard!" and pulled the trigger.

It would have taken me hours to die from such a belly wound if I had been a living man. He saw my eyes and knew me for what I was—the template of evil beside which he was no more than the merest shadow. Wordless, he turned and fled. The other two bolted after him into the night.

Jacob crouched beside one of the crumpled bodies. His gaze took in the street, the clotting shadows. He straightened up and came toward me. Behind the moonlit lenses, his eyes narrowed and then widened.

"I remember you," he said, wondering. "From San Francisco. The transfusion, it worked. You're alive!" He paused, brows knotting. "But you haven't changed at all."

But he had. The road had taken its toll, the nights birthing babies in lonely ranch houses, the miles walked in sleet or blazing heat, the poor food, the tainted water. I marked the lines around his eyes and mouth, the shining dome of his forehead where the hairline had receded.

I closed my hand around his arm, this skinny weakling of a man with no muscle to speak of, no strength, no fear. I could break him with a single finger.

"Where are you taking me?" he said.

It was the wrong question. Not where was I taking him, but where was *he* taking *me?*

THE RIVER SNAKED ALONG THE VALLEY FLOOR, BARELY MORE THAN a mud-banked trickle until the winter rains came again. A mule-drawn reaper crawled across the squares of gold-ripe grain. The village itself centered around a much-repaired farmhouse, barn and silo. A crisscross of unpaved streets led to a smithy, chicken coops, pigsties, pens for goats and milk cows, a shed for the mules. The roofs were covered with water heaters, tubes of age-whitened plastic.

Jacob trudged down the hill toward the village. His long coat was now too warm, and the pack weighed heavily. Thirst gnawed at him. He knew he should have stopped, rested. There had not seemed enough time.

A woman's voice hailed him from the cluster of houses. Something white waved from one of the windows, a dish towel or apron. His eyes were no longer keen enough to tell. When the woman emerged, he recognized her—the elderly beekeeper, wearing faded denim overalls several sizes too big for her. She offered him a dipper of water.

The water had a faint metallic taste. Jacob handed back the cup. "I had word a child is sick. Whose is it?"

"The Coopers' boy. Young Peter."

And so, the town had gone on without him, kaleidoscopic lives slipping through his fingers.

The Cooper family house lay to the north end of the settlement. It was one of the newer buildings, pine from the scrub forest ten miles seaward, simple and a bit dark because window glass was hard to come by. The door stood open to reveal a wood-burning stove made from parts of gasoline automobiles.

Jacob paused at the threshold. Perhaps Victor's sensitivities had rubbed off on him, because he could feel the fear hanging like a pall in this house. These people remembered all too vividly the plagues, the bloodrot and the fevers. Even a common cold might send whispers through the community, "Will it begin again?"

This night, it comes for me?

A chair leg scraped over the bare wood floor in the second, smaller room. For a moment Jacob did not recognize the woman standing shadowed there, one hand on the door frame, the skull-shaped face, the eyes like wells of darkness. In the texture of her bones, he read the certainty that her child was dying.

Then she moved into the light and became Mary Cooper. "Doc!" An exhale, barely audible.

The room was small and close, one bed covered with a faded quilt under a window and another along the opposite wall, a wooden chest and the rocking chair where Mary had nursed her babies. The unfinished walls bore pegs for clothing and a narrow shelf with handmade toys, bits of antler, and smooth-worn green glass.

Jacob remembered Peter as a whirlwind of freckles and an impish grin, always sporting a skinned knee or elbow. Now he'd shrunk, his skin stretched over sharp-edged bones. Jacob leaned over him, noticing the fever-bright eyes, the purpling bruise on one temple. Emmanuel Cooper might be a stern man, but never one to strike his children.

Jacob slid his pack off, took off the coat and folded it carefully, sat on the bed beside the boy's legs. The child did not respond. Jacob touched the pale cheek, felt the the heat radiating from the boy's body. He pulled the patched quilt up around the thin shoulders.

Relentlessly his mind enumerated the symptoms. Fever, pallor, easy bruisability. Rapid onset. Age between three and seven. Exposure to mutagenic agents—who in the entire community had escaped that? He couldn't be sure without a microscopic examination of the boy's blood.

Jacob sat back and ran his fingers over his beard. And if he were correct, then what? He had a little pancillin left from the last batch from Sanfran, some cephaloxin for resistant bacterial strains; he could make tinctures of willow or foxglove or birth-ease for other conditions. Poppy syrup to numb the pain. Straws, straws in the wind.

We cured leukemia once.

He knew why no one had sent for him earlier, though he had once lived as one of them. Now he saw what he had not wanted to see before, their need to continue without him.

An idea germinated and took root in Jacob's mind. It might not work, for the malignancy arose from the bone marrow and not the blood itself. It might do no more than buy the child a little more time. Victor might refuse. But what choice did he have but to try?

"ARE THERE MORE LIKE YOU?" JACOB ASKED ME. WE HUDDLED

I knew the darkness of *blood—the hunger, the fever, the thousand intimate shades of death. But of the light of blood, I knew nothing.*

around a campfire somewhere near the old Oregon border, him for warmth and me without any good reason. I had fed earlier on the blood of a chicken, which Jacob had drained and then salted for his own dinner.

The question was one I had been dreading. I could not understand how Jacob could know what I was, could have seen what he had seen, and still have no fear of me. And with every one of his interminable questions, I feared the ending of that innocence.

Some streak of madness urged me to say, "What, should I create another as cursed as I am?"

"Tell me, who has cursed you?"

I looked away into the night. The only sounds were the faint crush of the falling embers. Images of the past, like flakes of light, sprang up behind my eyes. I could not hold them. I no longer remembered a time before I became evil or what sin placed me forever beyond redemption. I knew only there had been such a time.

Jacob's question echoed in my mind. Who had cursed me? Who? Could it be that I had become only what I believed I must be?

The thought blew away in an instant. I was damned forever; the priests had sworn it a thousand times over.

"I am what I am," I said in a voice I hardly knew as my own.

I had had no choice but to drink the blood that changed me forever. I never knew why the *nosferatu* forced it down my throat, most likely to share his eternal damnation. But what if immortality were a gift freely offered? What if there were two of us to share the long unbroken nights?

"A long time ago, a very long time ago," Jacob said, his voice settling into the musical rhythm of a storyteller's, "a wise man named Maimonides wrote that each man is both good and evil, in such balance that perhaps his very next action could tip the scales and determine his fate. And if a city contains both good and evil people, in equal proportion, then one man's choice might determine its course. And if an entire nation—"

"Stop!" I saw where this story was going. "What has any of this to do with me?"

"I think it is Maimonides's choice we all must make. Every hour, every day. Even me, Victor. Even you."

JACOB SETTLED ON THE PORCH WITH THE CHILDREN WHO WERE TOO young to work in the fields. They crowded around him, their eyes shining. He took each child on his lap in turn. At first they were stiff, for it had been too long since he was here last. Then they softened to his words and touch. His mood lifted. Through the afternoon he examined them individually, telling each his favorite story. Aesop and Moses and Peter Pan.

He thought to continue with the other villagers, the women who'd stayed behind and the others who returned early to prepare the evening meal, but he felt too tired. His chest wavered on the border of pain, a thrumming deep in his bones. He told himself it was only the long night, the walk down the mountain—no, it was more than that.

This night, it comes for me?

WE CAME TO A TOWN THAT HAD LOST ITS DOCTOR AND PLEADED with Jacob to stay. There was a hunger in him, a weariness from all those shiftless years. I saw it in the way he touched the dusty books, the exquisite care with which he laid out the dead man's instruments. He set the brass microscope on the dining room table and lit an alcohol lamp.

I watched as he squeezed a drop of his own blood on a glass slide. The rank, intoxicating perfume filled me. I held myself very still.

He gestured for me to come nearer. Warmth lingered on the focusing wheels where he'd touched them. As I squinted through the aperture, the image jumped and trembled, a phantasm of brilliance.

I sat back in astonishment, for although I knew the lamp supplied the illumination, in that moment it seemed to me that the blood itself gave rise to the light.

"Look again," Jacob said. "Blood is not magic, but tiny enucleated cells. Corpuscles, they were once called."

I would have wept then, if I had been able, at the sight of those swirling discs, pale as damask rose, in their silent, mystical dance. I knew the darkness of blood—the hunger, the fever, the thousand intimate shades of death. But of the light of blood, I knew nothing.

It wasn't until Jacob laid one hand on my shoulder that I tore myself away. He adjusted the lamp to shine on the pages of the book he held. "Here is a stem cell, found in the bone marrow. It gives rise to these immature cells, called erythroblasts, which lose their nuclei as they synthesize the hemoglobin to carry oxygen to every part of the body. It's not so mysterious."

Not so mysterious.

All through that night, I pored over the books and stared at the circle of light with its ghostly shapes. I had seen books like this over the years, the drawings of Vesalius and Michelangelo. They held no interest for me, beyond a fleeting acknowledgment of the artistry involved.

But this—this orb of light-soaked blood, this remembrance of the time I had brought healing instead of death—it drew me, excited me, sickened me.

But Jacob was wrong. It *was* mysterious. Life itself was mysterious. Mysterious and beautiful and terrible beyond bearing, because I no longer had a part in it.

JACOB AWOKE SOME TIME LATER, THIRSTY BUT STEADIER IN HIS thoughts. A pulse rippled through his chest. He got up, used the outhouse, washed, and began his work again. The men presented the usual array of badly healed wounds, minor infections, and arthritis. A cough that might be old tuberculosis or one of the spore-borne lungrots or only a reaction to harvest dust. He prescribed, dosed, warned, instructed in exercise and hygiene.

The Cooper parents nodded as Jacob explained his diagnosis. It didn't matter to them that he could not be certain. "We don't want him to suffer," Emmanuel Cooper said, his voice rough.

The evening meal, communal because of the ongoing harvest, was eaten on long tables outside the old farmhouse. Hand-carved

A wave of emotion—tenderness and awe and something he could not put a name to—swept through him. His heart fluttered like a caged bird.

wooden trenchers alternated with stoneware plates, for the kiln was small. The women served pies of smoked ham and rabbit, potatoes, beans and onions, stewed apples, cornmeal cakes with honey. A chair instead of the usual benches was brought up for Jacob.

They all settled in their places and even the children grew still, watching Jacob with solemn eyes. The coming twilight carried an expectant hush. Emmanuel Cooper turned to Jacob. "Will you lead us in grace, Doc?"

Faces turned toward him, sun-reddened and weathered. He had birthed many of them, treated them, held them when their loved ones died. How could he throw this honor back in their faces?

"I will lead you," he said in a scratchy voice. He paused, waiting for words. Gentle as dew, they came.

"Blessed be Thou, Lord our God, Master of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth...."

More, there should be more. His thoughts blurred. Phrases in Hebrew came to him and blew away again, like dead leaves.

Stillness hung over the table. Jacob's eyes focused on the bowed heads. A wave of emotion—tenderness and awe and something he could not put a name to—swept through him. Tears rose to his eyes; his heart fluttered like a caged bird.

From the other end of the table, someone murmured, "In Jesus's name, Amen." A moment later, they were laughing and handing round the platters of food.

HALF-DROWSING, JACOB SAT ON A CHAIR DRAWN UP BESIDE THE Cooper boy's bed. Around him, the house lay still and quiet. The two older children, who usually shared the second bed, spent the night with friends so that he could stay near his patient. From outside came the small noises of the animals, the barely audible cries of hunting bats.

A soft tap and Victor entered, carrying a leather satchel and a large pack. He moved warily, his eyes never still. Emmanuel Cooper waited inside the door. He smelled faintly of cut hay. Jacob laid one hand on his arm and said, "We will do our best for him."

Emmanuel Cooper started for the door, every line of his body expressing reluctance. Teeth glimmered in a fleeting smile. "I'll pray for you." A nod. "Doc, Doc Victor."

The door closed.

"*Oy.* Did you hear that, Victor? Now you're included in his prayers." Without waiting for a reply, Jacob described the results of his earlier examination.

Victor listened, his eyes fixed on the boy's pale face. "Acute myelogenous leukemia. Diagnosis confirmed by the presence of leukemic blast cells in peripheral blood smears."

"Let's take a look then, you and I."

Victor's pack contained the sturdy wooden box that housed Jacob's microscope, alcohol lamp, and light-focusing mirrors. At Jacob's command, Victor set up the apparatus on the clothes chest.

Jacob smeared a drop of the boy's blood on a clean glass slide, added stain and a cover slip. Ignoring the ache in his knee, he crouched beside the chest and positioned the slide on the microscope stage. The eyepiece showed him a circle of brightness. Then, as he adjusted the fine focus, detail became apparent—the reddish biconcave discs, a single mature white cell...

He wet his lips as his eyes scanned the field, marking the primitive, undifferentiated cells that should not be there.

Victor bent over the microscope, adjusting the focus and scanning the slide. He spent a long time looking. "Those are the blast cells?"

"Yes," Jacob answered. "They'll be all through his bone marrow, crowding out the normal blood-forming elements. Liver, spleen, lymph nodes, too."

"The sickness rages in his blood." Victor knew the technical terminology; he remembered everything Jacob had taught him, everything he'd read in the medical texts. It was not his intellect that responded so powerfully to the boy's illness.

"Do you remember how you cured me?" Jacob asked. "How my blood flowed into your body and then you reversed it? My blood—through your body—and back to mine. Like dialysis, only better. Deeper. Permanent."

"Dialysis," Victor said, as if tasting the word. "You mean to try it with this child. You think it will work?"

"I think we must find out."

Victor placed one hand on the faded quilt, not quite touching the boy's arm. "Why should I do such a thing?"

"You must answer that question yourself," Jacob said. *Even as I must.*

"You mean Maimonides's choice? You mean the single action that will tip the balance between good and evil in my soul?" His voice roughened into a whisper. "There is no balance, Jacob."

Behind Victor's quiet statement, Jacob thought he heard the echoes of despair. "No balance, Victor?" he said gently. "Yesterday that might have been true. But today or tomorrow, perhaps there will be."

"There *will be*? You mean that if I save this boy's life now, it will somehow make a difference?"

Jacob laid one hand on Victor's shoulder. "Was it evil to save my life?"

"I had no choice. Not that first time."

"And afterward?"

Victor looked up with his lightless eyes. "That was many years ago. And this boy, what is he to me?"

Jacob recalled the moment he truly acknowledged what Victor was. He had asked himself almost the same question, *What is this creature to me? He is not a Jew. He is not even a man.* He'd spent the rest of his life searching for the answer.

"What you are to me, or I to you. What any one of us is to another, a fellow human being in need of our help."

With feral quickness, Victor leapt to his feet. His lips drew back over his teeth and his face went ashen. His legs trembled. He cried out, *"I cannot change what I am!"*

Weariness swept through Jacob. He felt worn out with a lifetime's

struggle, as if he had given all that was in him to give. He turned and walked to the door.

Victor started to follow him, then paused, as if hesitant. Something shifted behind the darkness of his eyes, something disused and half-forgotten. He turned, glanced down at the boy. With his free hand, he brushed the boy's hair back from his forehead and caressed his cheek. For an instant, Jacob caught the expression on Victor's face. What he saw there was neither hunger nor desire, but the faintest shadow of hope.

Without a word, Victor opened the leather bag so that the lantern lit its contents, needles wrapped in fine boiled cloth, lengths of precious surgical tubing, disinfectant. Setting aside the bag of IV glucose water, its use-date long expired, he began laying out the transfusion equipment. He seemed to have forgotten Jacob's presence.

The sleeping boy didn't stir as Victor punctured his vein and then his own, attached the tubing to the needles and checked for air bubbles. Then Victor lay down and began slowly, rhythmically, to clench and open his fist.

Jacob stood by the door and watched, but he could not bring himself to lift the wooden latch. He lingered at the very edge of the light, his eyes held by the pool of brightness cast by the lantern. Life seemed to have gone on beyond him, as if it possessed a momentum of its own; he felt it slipping through his fingers.

JACOB WOKE TO THE CLATTER OF GOATS. HE PULLED HIS COAT OVER his shoulders, shivering in the mild morning air. His joints ached and his eyes stung as if from too little sleep. He felt a longing to be back in his own house, away from all the noise and bustle.

The boy's fever was down. He stirred and asked for breakfast as Jacob reexamined him and called the parents in. People came by in response to news spread by the older Cooper boys. They shook Jacob's hand. He tried to tell them about remissions and relapses and placebo effects.

What did it matter, he asked himself, if these country people did not grasp the niceties of prognosis? They knew the taste and scent of hope.

Jacob drank from the metal cup that hung beside the outdoor pump. He took off his coat and folded it, noticing the shiny cuffs, the bits of hair and dust, the grime along the collar. It smelled like an old man's coat.

The day filled with light, the clouds thin and hazy. Brightness drew him onward, up the trail to his mountain. He was already nine parts gone into the hills, with only his physical body yet to follow. One step and then another, he plodded and trudged, slowing to catch his breath, but never stopping.

HIS FEET FOLLOWED THE TRAIL OUT OF OLD HABIT, BUT AS HE WENT on, the familiar landmarks seemed increasingly wild and exotic, as if he had somehow strayed across unimaginable distances, across centuries as well as miles. He might be journeying with Moses out of Egypt, with the sun pouring over his shoulders and the sky stretching overhead.

He thought of the medical instruments that he'd left behind. There they would remain, safe, for Victor to find. It seemed fitting that he set forth with no baggage, no provisions, alone into the wilderness.

Victor. He should have prepared him better or done more so that the townspeople would accept him. He should not have held on so long.

At moments he seemed to pass through the steepening hills without a trace. Hawks pierced the bright sky, lizards sunned themselves on rocks, insects whirred. Sweat beaded his face. His breath came high and fast, too fast.

Pain crept through his chest, tightening like a wire net over his left shoulder and arm. Panting, he sat down on the tufts of dried grass that lined the path. The angina would pass, he told himself, not believing his own words. The warm air turned chill, and the sky dimmed. His left hand trembled. Then hillside slipped and faded.

JACOB AWOKE IN HIS OWN BED. CANDLES, HIS PRECIOUS SABBATH candles, burned on the nearby table. He thought he had never seen anything as wondrous and as fragile as their flickering light.

Victor had drawn one of the benches beside the bed. His face was very pale. He held a small knife in his hands, one Jacob had never seen before. The metal glinted; it looked very sharp.

"You have run out of time," Victor said. "It must be now, or you will truly die and nothing I can do will bring you back."

Jacob opened his mouth. For a moment, nothing came out, no words, no breath. He shook his head.

"Why do you persist in this folly?" Victor sounded more desperate than angry. "It's not a sin—you must see that. The exchange of blood between brothers is sacred, an ancient and honorable tradition. Listen to me! The priests of my homeland make blood out of wine—Christ's holy blood, they call it. They make it every day and thrice on Sundays. If they can do that with their words and handwavings, then why can't you turn my blood into holy wine?"

Jacob reached out, grasped the hand that held the knife. It was like trying to hold steel with paper. "It would still be blood."

Victor freed himself from Jacob's grasp and, with a single movement, slashed across his own wrist. Black fluid welled up along the cut.

"You need not die," Victor said. "Even now, you need not die. Why can't you accept my gift, even as I accepted yours?"

Jacob lay back. Night closed in around him and cold seeped into his marrow. He remembered another story his own father had told him. Once, a long time ago, wise and holy men had asked God to put an end to death. God had agreed, but on this condition: that everyone would remain forever exactly as they were. That there would be no more death, but no more birth, no youth, no discovery, no first awakening of love.

No moment of breathless silence beneath the stars.

Jacob had never been able to understand why the wise men had chosen death when every instinct urged otherwise. Perhaps God had been right all along. For something new to be born into the world, something old must pass.

Victor put down the knife. His hair swept back from a widow's peak to fall around his face like a mourner's shawl. Within his endless eyes, a flicker of light battled against shadow.

"I shall remember you, Jacob Rosenberg, you stubborn old Jew. Every time I make Maimonides's choice, every time I go among those people to heal them, every time I turn toward life, then shall I remember you."

Victor picked up Jacob's hand in his marble-smooth fingers. For the first time, his touch felt warm, and Jacob realized that was because his own flesh had grown so cold. Jacob's sight went milky, as if the color had bleached out of the candlelight.

Yis-gadal ve-yis-kadash she-may rabbo be-lmo deeve-ro chiroosay...."

Slowly, but without any hesitation, Victor began reciting the *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead. Jacob had never spoken it aloud, for the ritual required a community. Over the centuries, the words had not changed—not Hebrew but Aramaic, from the time of the Babylonian captivity. Victor might have heard it in a Warsaw ghetto, a Palestinian oasis, a New York cemetery, engraved forever on his perfect memory. The same phrases of faith and continuation might have been spoken anywhere, were still being spoken everywhere.

"Magnified and sanctified be His great name in the world which He created...."

Jacob's lips moved with the words, his voice an echo to Victor's, yet somehow it sounded as if there were other voices joined to theirs, spilling out of the room over the hillside. Their music filled him utterly. He felt an answering presence, a pressure growing deep within him, strangely painless, like an immense bubble pushing outward.

"May He who makes peace in the heavens, make peace for us...."

Galactic light inundated the bubble, each mote of brilliance apart and separate, each effortlessly bound to the swirling immensity. In his very heart and core, the last stubborn stronghold opened itself, released its grasp. The light swept through him, fading and ecstatic with the final whispered *Amen*. ❧

THE RUBY

BY BEVERLY SUAREZ-BEARD
Illustration by Web Bryant

Dragons can take many shapes. Some of them live in mountain caves, some in human hearts.

THE CLOUDBURST began when they were halfway up the mountain. The muddy path became a chocolate torrent, slippery and impassable. They sheltered in a bamboo thicket, while the rain trickled down the necks of their ponchos, and their boots filled with water. Yen-Kang, the guide, nineteen years old, wiry and proud of his toughness, pulled out a cigarette. He tried to light it, unsuccessfully. On the third try he gave up.

"I don't need this shit," he said, in Nung.

Eddie Chang watched him put the cigarettes away. He would have been amused if he weren't so tired. Tired of the rain and the mosquitoes and the edge-of-nausea feeling he got





from malaria pills. Tired of twelve years of smuggling, of stealing and hiding and lying. Tired of knowing he might have to kill again. At forty-one, he was old enough to think about getting out. "I don't need this shit either," he said, in Mandarin. "You got paid. I can't control the weather."

"You Americans have *yuan* to burn," the guide said. There was a stream of water running down his nose. "That old pot won't do anything for you. If it gave power, do you think it would be rusting in some mountain?" He laughed, then coughed, a smoker's cough, grating. "A big old pot."

If the historical sources were correct, they would find an imperial cauldron of the Sui Dynasty. Along with it, there was a cache of other treasures, hidden there during the eighteenth century by the servants of a fleeing nobleman. Chang's own cut would be larger than the guide could imagine. But still too small. Too small to be a ticket out.

The porters were on the other side of the mountain, waiting. Once Chang knew the way to the treasure, he would be able to lead them there himself.

Lightning flashed; the air sizzled. He counted the seconds before the thunder. Three.

"Don't look," the guide said. "The dragons are fighting."

"What?"

"When it thunders, the old people say the dragons are fighting. They say it's bad luck to see one."

"To see a dragon?"

"In its own form. Sometimes, when they take human shape, you can see them, no problem." The guide laughed, his smooth face creasing. "They also say that when the dragons fight, huge pearls fall from the sky. But I don't see the grandmothers out looking for them." The guide laughed again. "Your name is Chang. They forget all this in America?"

The rain grew heavier, the bamboo thicket wholly inadequate. It was like standing in a cataract, the air was so thick with water. It was like standing at the bottom of the sea.

"Shit!" Yen-Kang said. "You can forget moving on in this. Look at the path."

"You have any ideas?"

"There's a cave near here. I think I can find it."

Chang looked at his watch. There was time. If Wu and the porters had to wait a few hours longer, they'd find something to do with themselves, probably with the local girls. They'd have to haul ass to the border to meet the chopper, but it wouldn't leave without them. "Then find it."

They had to leap over the stream the path had become. They followed it a little way farther, stepping through the brush beside it, cutting through vines and creepers, slapped in the face by wet, rebounding branches.

The guide climbed a little way up, disappeared among the trees. "Here it is!" he called. "Mr. Chang, here it is!"

The cave opening was large, large and high. Although the day was dark, inside the cave there was light enough to see. Yen-Kang pulled out his lighter, struck it. Paintings flared to life on the walls. Ancient paintings, faded, pale.

Chang forgot to be miserable. He lit his flashlight, trained it on the walls. He made out the form of a dragon, blue, the Dragon of the East, Rain-Bearer. "You knew these were here?" he asked.

"Of course." Yen-Kang was nonchalant. "Old paintings. So what?"

Chang beamed the flashlight back into the darkness. "How big is the cave?"

"Big. There's a big room, a lake. You could get lost."

"What do they call this place? Does it have a name?"

"Green Jade Dragon Cave. So what? It doesn't go up, only down. It won't take you where you want to go. There's nothing to see."

"I'd like to look." He followed the walls, the twisting and turnings of the wide passage. The dragon paintings continued for a number of yards, then faded to the blankness of rock. A cold draft blew.

The transition from passage to cavern was sudden, overwhelming. The darkness was immense, the timid light of the flashlight unable to give any idea as to its extent. In the silence Chang could hear the pounding of his heart, the sound of water dripping.

Then, behind him, a harsh cough, muffled feet against rock.

His voice was loud, insis people say other things They say dragons are not good to mess with

"There's a lake," offered the guide. "Not far."

Chang walked forward, carefully, following the beam of the flashlight. He stopped, trained the flashlight forward, into the distance.

The shine of water. A glimmer of something else, somewhere in the lake just beyond the beam of the flashlight. Reflected light? Something red.

He moved the beam. There it was again. Blood-red. Glowing. "What's that?" he said. "You said there'd be nothing to see."

The lake stretched on into the darkness. How far? It was impossible to judge. But it was shallow. He waded out, steeling himself against the cold of the water, hunting with his flashlight.

From behind him, at the water's edge, Yen-Kang spoke. "Mr. Chang? What did you see?"

The beam caught a flash of red. Chang waded toward it.

"Mr. Chang? Mr. Chang?"

He was thigh-deep now. The light grew deeper, richer. There.

He barked his shins on solid rock, cursed softly. He'd had his eyes on the bit of stone projecting from the lake surface, not realizing how broad-based the formation was.

There, in the shallow bowl of the stone island. A crystal of some kind. A red crystal.

He held the flashlight in his teeth and crawled up slippery rock. He reached, missed. Reached again and took the crystal in his hand.

It was large, half as large as his fist. Warm, as if it had spent the ages in a warm mineral spring.

He zipped it into his vest pocket and crawled back down again. Then, standing in the lake, he took it out to get a better look.

It was blood-red, semi-ovoid, clear, sparkling with a vein of fire. It was huge. Could it be a ruby? He turned over the possibilities, the implications.

"Mr. Chang?" The voice came from closer than he expected. The guide had waded out into the lake. His voice was loud, insistent. "The old people say other things about dragons. They say dragons are gods, that it's not good to mess with them. But you know that, right?"

Chang turned, hiding the stone in his closed fist. "You don't believe what the old people say, do you, Yen-Kang?"

"No, certainly," the guide said nervously. "Still, that's what they say. Whatever you found, Mr. Chang, put it back. Please."

Then what will you do? thought Chang. Come back and take it for yourself?

"It's just a piece of limestone," Chang said. "Very pretty, but without value. But if you insist, I'll put it back." He turned, zipped the stone back in his pocket, climbed back up the rock. At the top he unzipped another pocket, pulled out his compass, set it glass side down. It made a satisfying clink against the rock.

Back at the lake edge, Yen-Kang lit a cigarette, took a few puffs,

tent. "The old about dragons. gods, that it's them."

dropped it, ground it to ash against the cave floor. His hands were shaking. He'd be a shoo-in for an Oscar. "It's good you put that back," he said. "Very good."

They started back through the passage.

"I think we can be on our way now," Chang said. "Listen."

Silence from outside the cave. No rain. No thunder. Blessed silence.

Daylight streamed through the cave entrance. Outside, the forest was filled with the steam of evaporating rain. The storm was over.

THE SUI CAULDRON WAS CRUSTY AND GREEN, TOO LARGE FOR ONE man to carry. It was no wonder it had remained untouched through the centuries. The other objects were gone, plundered long before. The journey would turn a loss.

Chang dismissed the porters and kept only two mules. He had to watch expenses. He and Wu could make the trip alone.

He was tense throughout the journey south; if they were stopped at the border, if Wu and thus the Group discovered he had been hiding something as valuable as the ruby… He feared the Group far more than he feared any government.

The journey across the mountains was uneventful. They encountered no border patrols. The chopper met them as planned.

The skies were blue, cloudless. The flight was perfect. He felt the weight at his belt and smiled to himself. Soon he would be free, free of the Group, free to retire.

He would get rid of the stone in Bangkok. There was a man he knew, a man who had retired from treasure-smuggling to treasure-dealing, small treasures, too inconsequential to be of interest to his former connections. Chang had been young, an excitement junkie, unable to understand why the man, Sulak, would want to retire. But he'd helped him take the little extra he needed to do it. Sulak owed him a favor.

The chopper landed near Bangkok. It was met by Jeff Olmsted, second cousin of Chang's ex-brother-in-law. Olmsted was six-foot-three, with long, graying mustaches and a mournful face. He looked over the cauldron, then gave Chang one thousand dollars.

Chang looked it over. He had to keep up pretenses. "I won't make alimony on this," he said.

"We'll see what happens once the cauldron's auctioned." Olmsted's voice was always a surprise: a pleasant, boyish tenor. "You know we try to be fair."

"Right," Chang said.

THE TEAK HOUSE, WITH ITS SMALL GARDEN OF FLAME TREES AND bougainvillea, seemed unchanged. But when he knocked, a strange young woman answered the door.

Chang placed his hands together, raised them to his forehead and bowed. "*Sawaddee*. Hello. I'm looking for Mr. Sulak."

"*Sawaddee*," the young woman said, returning his bow. "Mr. Sulak is dead."

"It gives me pain to hear that," Chang said. Sweat trickled down his face. "We were friends. You… are his daughter?"

"Yes," the young woman said. She couldn't have been more than twenty-two. Her face was innocent, soft with youth.

She stopped Chang as he turned to go. "You say you were friends," she said. "What is your name, if I may be permitted to ask?"

"Chang. Eddie Chang."

"Chang? Eddie Chang? He spoke to me of you! Please come in."

"No, I can't. I'm sorry."

She touched his arm. "Forgive me for saying this," she said, "but you don't look well. Are you in some kind of difficulty?"

"No. No."

"My father would have wanted me to help you."

"There's nothing you can do," he said. "Nothing."

"Are you very sure? My father made me part of his business."

"I think I'll come in after all," Chang said.

She served him sweet iced tea in a tall glass, creamy with coconut milk. He remembered her name now: Apasra.

"I met you once," he said. "When you were about ten."

"Forgive me," she said. "I don't remember."

He thought of his own son, Gordon, safe and visiting with relatives in Singapore. He would never put him in danger, never involve him in the business. Gordon didn't even know what he did, thought he was an international buyer for a chain of department stores. He looked at her soft, young nose, her delicate eyebrows, the hairs as fine and soft as a child's. "How could he do that?" he said. "How could he involve you?"

"Involve me in what?" she said. "Buying and selling old things?"

He sipped at his tea. "None of them illegal?"

"Illegal?" She met his eyes. "You seemed in a hurry when I first saw you. Please tell me what it is I can do to help you."

"It would mean a lot of profit," he said slowly. "For you as well as for me. But there may be some risk."

"Risk?" she said. "What kind of risk?"

"I need to dispose of a valuable item," he said. "A very valuable item. It may not be easy."

She smiled. "My father thought small," she said. "I have buyers at all levels. How valuable is it?"

Her face registered no expression when he held out the stone. A professional. He felt his qualms begin to disappear.

She examined it closely under the light. "I'm almost certain it's corundum," she said. "Ruby. It looks like Mogok. See the color? Pigeon blood. I'd say more than nine hundred carats."

"Can you find a buyer?"

"I don't know. I think I can. You will, of course, want to hold onto the stone while I negotiate? I'll need photographs."

"I'm booked on a flight that leaves in four days," he said.

"I'll speak to the buyer today. Can you come back the day after tomorrow?"

FOR FEAR OF THIEVES, HE KEPT THE STONE ON HIS BODY, EVEN AT night. It seemed to have an intrinsic warmth that was more than the mere reflection of his body heat, which made him think of Yen-Kang's superstitious babbling and the European myth of dragon hoards and cursed treasure. Ridiculous. And yet...its presence on his body kept him awake and spoiled his dreams, when he was lucky enough to have them.

It occurred to him that it might be too large to sell; it was suitable only for the crown jewels of a prince or the vaults of a collector. He might have to delay, might have to get the stone cut into smaller pieces. It would mean losing more of his precious time with Gordon, the precious summer which was all he had of his son.

Apasra confirmed his fears. "It's too big to wear," she said. "There was a collector—but he didn't want to come up with its full value."

He called Gordon in Singapore. "I'll be late," he said. "Maybe a couple of weeks. Are you OK there?"

There was a pause at the other end of the line. "I'm fine."

"I'll get you back to your mother in time for school. She'd kill me if I didn't."

"I don't care about school." Another pause. "I miss you, Dad."

The gem cutter's shop was near the Chao Phraya River, in a ramshackle old house on a *klong*, nestled among other old houses; mossy pilings held it precariously above the water. Chang and Apasra arrived together not long after dawn, in a rented motorboat, while around them the *klong* sprang to life, filled with barges of rice and teak and poled sampans piled high with fruits and vegetables.

The gem cutter was a serene and polite little man. He met them at the landing platform and led them into the two small front rooms that were his waiting room and workshop. That the back rooms were occupied by his family was made clear by the sound of two children arguing and a mother's reprimand. A baby began to wail.

The gem cutter held the stone up, turned it this way and that, flashing little bits of ruby light around the room. He led them into the workshop to examine the stone further. "Not spinel," he said at last. "Ruby. The color is too rich even for Mogok—where did you find such a gem?"

He said nothing about its warmth. Perhaps he ascribed it to the tropical sun.

The tools in the workshop were primitive: bamboo sticks and hand-cranked wheels. The work would take some time.

"I understand you want me to start at once," the gem cutter said. "Why don't you watch from the front room? It's more comfortable."

"I would very much like to see how it is done," Apasra said. "May I sit in the workshop?"

From that, Chang understood that she was even more distrustful than he was.

The gem cutter was slow to begin, examining the stone interminably. Then he picked up a small hammer, held it poised.

Chang winced, waiting for the hammer to strike.

He never could have anticipated what would happen when it did.

At first he thought it was a bomb. The noise was deafening; the force of the explosion knocked him to the floor. Missiles of wood and bamboo and stone flew everywhere; one hissed by his ear to embed itself in the wall behind him. He felt a stinging in his hands. The building rocked on its pilings, then slowly tilted backwards.

The air reeked of ozone and burning. He righted himself, began to crawl gingerly toward the workshop. Who knew what movement might make the pilings collapse?

The workshop was bright; there were new holes in the walls, unintended windows. The back wall was charred and blackened, smoldering. The back doorway was blocked, half underwater.

Apasra was dead. She lay on her back, one arm extended. There was a hole in her head, a bloody gash in her throat.

The gem cutter was concealed behind debris; only his right leg was free. Chang thought he saw the leg twitch, wondered if he had imagined it.

In the middle of the floor, between the two bodies and well above the water line, lay a puddle of clear fluid. In the center of the puddle lay the ruby.

Or what was left of it. Small pieces, shards, lay scattered. Only one large piece remained, slightly concave, its edges ragged and irregular. In the center of that piece lay something small and twitching. Something alive.

It was moist, perhaps a little more than an inch long, and reddish pink, somehow obscene. A piece of artery or vein, a chunk of intestine, somehow still pulsing?

Then he crawled closer and saw. It was an embryo. More amphibious than reptilian, with tiny feet tipped by tiny claws. The body was jointed; around the small gasping mouth were long antennae, somewhat like whiskers. In the throat, no larger than a pea, was something round and glowing, pearllike.

While he watched, the tiny alien thing died.

It was crazy to think it, and yet...could the embryo have been the source of the explosion?

He thought of Yen-Kang and his talk of dragons. He remembered the dragon paintings on the cave walls, like yet unlike this creature. He thought of the ruby's troubling, intrinsic warmth.

At first he thought it was a bomb. The noise was deafening; the force of the explosion knocked him to the floor. Missiles of wood and bamboo and stone fle

Was it possible…that this…was a dragon's egg?

The embryo lay on a piece of ruby (eggshell?) that was well over two hundred carats. He would have to move it if he wanted to salvage anything. If he wanted to salvage the rest of his life.

He reached for it. Drops of blood fell from his hands, fell into the fluid, spiralling gently. He looked down, noticed the cuts on his hands, ignored them. He would have to hurry; the police would soon arrive.

There was a groan from behind the debris. The gem cutter's exposed leg moved.

Chang grabbed the ruby. A few drops of liquid touched his hands, burning them. His open cuts were flaming agony. He shook off the dead embryo. It hit the puddle with a splash.

The gem cutter spoke. "What was that? Is someone there?"

Chang hesitated, wondering if it would be risky to leave the gem cutter alive. He had never learned Chang's name, but he could identify his face.

The gem cutter freed himself, sat up. There was a nasty gash on his forehead. He looked straight at Chang. There was something wrong with his eyes. "Is someone there?" he said.

The gem cutter was blind.

Chang crept upward across the slanting floor, cautiously, quietly. He opened the front door on his knees, rolled forward into the murky water below. The house shuddered.

bomb. The noise the explosion Missiles of wood w everywhere...

Sampans were clustered across the canal, their occupants watching.

"For heaven's sake, get help!" he shouted. "There are people hurt in there!"

Then he dove for the shadows.

It was only later that he realized that he had heard no groans, no cries for help from the back of the house, the rooms where the family lived. He had heard only silence.

HE MAILED THE REMAINING CHUNK OF RUBY TO HIMSELF AT HIS POST office box at home on Oahu. He secreted it inside a transistor radio and sent it in a box with some brass temple bells, a leather shadow play puppet, and a few pieces of laquerware, all of which he declared at the post office, filling out the slip while standing interminably in line.

He tried not to think about the ruby and the explosion. He tried not to think about the embryo he had found in the shards. He told himself there was nothing he could do about it now, that there was no way he could have known. He told himself that dragons, for lack of a better name, were animals, perhaps amphibians, slimy and slow-moving. Not powerful, not dangerous. Not magic.

With effort, he put the whole thing behind him. It was an ability he had had to acquire in order to survive.

He had three passports, each in a different name. He had used them before, but rarely. He used cash and one of his assumed names to purchase a new airline ticket, on the earliest flight to Singapore, one that left early that evening. He flew first class; there was nothing else available.

It was still daylight as he waited in the airport for his flight. He looked out the windows, noticed the dark clouds rolling in from the north. It was fortunate that he was flying south.

They were over Malaysia when the woman sat down in the empty seat beside him. She was polished, poised, her dress an expensive indigo silk; he guessed her age at twenty-seven. She was very beautiful.

She didn't attempt conversation at first, only sat in silence. He looked out the window, made an effort not to stare. But when the flight attendant passed by with the drinks, he noticed that the woman was crying.

The tears were running down her cheeks, as clear and free of mascara as a child's. They puddled in the silk of her dress. She looked at him.

He felt that he should do something, say something. "May I offer you a tissue?" he inquired in Thai.

She answered him in the southwestern dialect of Mandarin. "That would be kind," she said.

She wiped her eyes, blew her nose. "It's my son," she said after a while. "My son is dead."

Chang thought of Gordon. "I am so sorry," he said. "What a terrible loss."

"He was taken," she said. Tears sparkled like crystals in her eyes. "Killed. My son."

"My God. Did they find—did they find the ones who did it?"

"I looked for him," she said. "I couldn't find him. But I felt him die. Across the miles, I felt him die. And then I knew."

He was silent. She was crazy. Crazy.

She grabbed his arm. "I know who he is," she said. She closed her eyes, frowned, appeared to concentrate. "I know you," she said.

"What on earth can you mean?" he said uncomfortably. He would have to change seats, get away from her.

"I know you. You call yourself adventurer. Treasure-seeker. Why not speak the truth? Smuggler. Gold-grubber. Killer." She gripped his arm harder. "There is a gem cutter," she said. "A blind man who can no longer work. He will starve. It will take longer because he no longer has a family to feed. There was a young woman—"

"I must get up," he said. He had to get away from her, had to think things out, figure out who she was. Could the Group have sent her? How could they have known? He broke out in a sweat. "I have to use the restroom."

But she held him in a grip stronger than he would have thought possible. "This…projection into human shape makes it difficult to see," she said. "But with touch, that is remedied. I know you."

"I *must* get up," he said.

"You weren't always this way," she said. "Your parents… Han Chinese, living among foreigners. You were poor. Your mother grew sick…there was no gold for doctors. She died. You loved her."

Chang sat still and stunned.

"You have a gift with tongues. You had a wife…the men came from her family… the ones who made promises. You forgot how to be kind."

Chang found his voice. "Release my arm," he said, "or I will call the flight attendant."

"There is one thing you still love," she said.

His stomach clenched.

"Your son," she said. "You have a son."

That was when he found the strength to break away—or when she let him go.

He remained in the restroom until he grew calm, steeling himself for the return to his seat. Because he had to go back there, had to find out who she was, what she wanted of him.

When he entered first class, she was gone.

She wasn't in the restrooms or in the economy class seats. She

wasn't among the people who deboarded. As far as he could tell, she had never been on the plane.

HE LOOKED FOR HER ON THE FLIGHT FROM SINGAPORE TO HAWAII. He even asked the flight attendants if they had seen her, saying she was an old friend, that he had expected to meet her on this flight. No one had seen her.

This time he was in economy class. Gordon sat beside him in the aisle seat, reading an adventure story, studiously avoiding the window; he did not enjoy flying. At nine he was small, although if he took after his mother's side, he would grow to well over six feet. There was something about him that reminded Chang of his own mother, a seriousness in the eyes, a stubbornness about the set of the mouth. He was subdued now, clearly upset, but he'd come out of it in his own time. There was never any point in trying to force the issue.

They were half an hour from landing when the turbulence began. Below the plane, dark clouds were massing.

"There's something wrong, Dad," Gordon said suddenly.

"Don't worry. It's just turbulence."

"You know that's not what I mean. I mean with you. You don't look good."

"Not worse than your uncle, I hope. He should go on a diet."

Gordon was not to be distracted. His voice took on a plaintive note. "Dad?"

"What are you doing, Dad?" Gordon whispered.

"Don't turn around," Chang said. "Don't be obvious. There's a lady standing near first class. I don't want her to see me."

"I can see her, sort of. I don't have to turn my head." Gordon was quiet for a moment. Then he whispered, almost too low to hear: "Dad. What's this all about? Are you a spy?"

"No, no," Chang whispered. Gordon must never know, must never suspect... "Of course not. I met that lady on the other plane and she's crazy. She won't leave me alone."

"Oh." Even lower. Chang had to strain to catch the words: "I guess I thought that would explain things... Dad? Don't move. She's starting toward us." Then: "Uh oh. I think she's spotted you."

She stopped beside them. "You must be Gordon," she said. "His son. How delightful to meet you."

She knew Gordon's name. Chang put his newspaper aside. "I don't know how you know his name," he said. "But leave him alone."

"Fine," she said. "It's you I've come to talk to."

He couldn't risk her crazy talk, her revelations, in front of Gordon. "Why don't we go up to first class?" he said. "To your seat? Don't worry, Gordon. This won't take long."

There were only two other people in first class and both were sleeping. Chang took the aisle seat, kept his voice low. "I don't know what you want with me," he said. "But keep Gordon out of it."

"You took my son," she said. "You caused his death. I ask for your son in return."

"Look," he said, struggling to keep his voice patient. "I don't know what put the idea into your head, but I didn't take your little boy. I didn't kill him."

"He wasn't a boy," she said quietly.

"No? Is this a game? Am I supposed to guess—"

"He was a dragon."

Chang took a long, ragged breath. It came as no surprise that she knew about the ruby and its contents; she had known about the gem cutter. Did she know about the remaining chunk of ruby? She hadn't turned him in. "What do you want?" he said. "Money?"

"Money?" she said. There was disdain in her voice. "Even your little mortal son is no payment. Heaven requires a sacrifice."

"Go ahead," he said, giving way to anger. "Tell your little stories. If you knew how crazy you sound—"

"If you give me your son," she said. "You and everyone else on board this vessel will be safe. If you do not, you, your son, and everyone else will die."

She stood up, pushed past him to the aisle, went into the forward restroom.

He followed, waited outside. He knocked five minutes later.

It was empty.

He searched the other restrooms, the other seats. Again she was

Voices, chattering in twenty don, pressing hard against to the window. "Dad! They a dragon out there. I want

Chang looked out the window at the gathering storm clouds. Lightning flickered below; the turbulence grew worse.

"Dad?"

That his son loved him when they spent so little time together was a miracle, was grace. "You're right, Gordon," he said. "This trip was pretty hard on me. I need a break. I'd like to start by taking you camping when we get back—if that's OK with you."

The loudspeaker broke in on their conversation. It was the captain, informing them that due to severe weather, they would not be landing in Honolulu as planned. Instead they would be landing at Kona on the Big Island, where they could expect clear skies.

Gordon looked pale. Chang groaned; a long flight made longer. Then still another flight to take them home. He was exhausted and his legs ached.

Then he saw the woman. She stood in the doorway from first class, her gaze moving purposefully over the faces in economy. She had changed her indigo dress for a green one, embroidered in gold and silver threads.

Where had she come from?

Somehow, suddenly, he didn't want to see her, didn't want to ask her who she was, what she wanted. There was no way he could escape, no way he could leave his seat without her seeing him. He slouched low, hid behind a newspaper.

nowhere to be seen. He wondered if it was he who was going crazy, if he had imagined her, but no, Gordon had seen her.

"She's very pretty, Dad," Gordon said. "What's wrong with her? She didn't seem crazy to me."

"You have no idea," Chang said shortly. "If she even tries to talk to you again, you tell me."

The plane lurched, sliding cups across trays, clinking ice cubes. The seat belt sign blinked on. They were descending into the clouds.

The storm had followed them, which was unusual. It rarely rained on the east side of the Big Island.

He heard the screams and cries and then he saw it: a creature half as long as the plane but much thinner, flying without wings alongside them. The body was sinuous, milky green and iridescent. Long ruby whiskers streamed from a head that was scaled in gold.

He was hallucinating. He rubbed his eyes, looked again. It was still there. Impossibly, it was still there.

It spoke to him with its mind. *I am* lung, *the dragon*, it said. *Give me your son.*

It was true. Dear God in heaven, it was true.

He began to laugh, bitterly. He was being made to pay— not for the old man left to drown in Fujian, or the guard killed in Rangoon. He was being made to pay for this miscalculation, this mistake— this *accident.*

"Dad?"

languages. Gor- him, trying to get 're saying there's to see."

He had Gordon to think of. He choked back the crazy laughter, held it inside him where it simmered and steamed, hot acid eating at his stomach. He had Gordon to think of. He had to keep his head, find a way. He had always found a way.

What kind of creature was this dragon? Not a god, certainly. Not the voice of heaven. But a creature with unheard-of powers, nonetheless. Had it truly shapeshifted, or had that been illusion, imposed by some ability to manipulate the human mind? If illusion, which form, which location was the true one?

And how could he even hope to trick or fight it, when by reading his thoughts it could anticipate his every move?

You cannot fight me, human.

Voices, chattering in twenty languages. Gordon, pressing hard against him, trying to get to the window. "Dad! They're saying there's a dragon out there. I want to see."

"Stay away from the window," Chang said.

But Gordon pushed up beside him, stuck his nose against the glass. "It's real, Dad!" he said. "It's truly, actually real!"

"*Stay away from the window*!" He pushed Gordon back, thought desperately: I didn't know what the ruby was. I wouldn't have taken it if I had known.

The dragon's thoughts were cold. *You were warned.*

What good will it do to take my son? It won't change what has happened.

Heaven requires a sacrifice.

Then do anything, take anything from me. But not my son. Not my son.

As if in answer, lightning blazed forth from the claws of the dragon, struck the wing engine. The plane lurched violently. People screamed. Gordon clutched at him, strong with terror. "Dad? What happened? Dad!"

Somewhere in the cabin an old woman wailed in Min, something about the justice of heaven. Outside the window the clouds moved in strange patterns, driven by powerful winds. The dragon soared amongst them, flickering in and out of sight.

Not a god. But it might as well have been.

The engine shot flames. The loudspeaker came on, the words of the pilot lost in the wails and screams of the passengers.

Please, Chang thought. Have mercy. These people are innocent. My son is innocent.

The clouds whipped by, boiling and frenzied. Chang thought of air currents, of funnel clouds and wind shear. The plane shuddered and groaned.

The emergency exit door two rows in front of Chang and Gordon began to rattle. Chang looked for Gordon, found him already securely belted in, hands gripping the arms of his chair, knuckles white.

Then the emergency door blew out.

Handbags, pillows, magazines blew out after it. The wind howled. Passengers clung to their seats, fighting the wind that sucked at them, clutched at them, with savage, searching fingers. Seats groaned, straining against the bolts that held them. The loudspeaker crackled on again, was lost in the din.

Chang touched one of Gordon's hands, where it clung to the seat. Gordon looked up at him, shaking, and tried to smile.

It came to him then. It came to him as it should have come earlier, as it would have come, if he had been the man he once had been. His stomach clenched, his throat tightened, and yet, strangely, for the first time in years he felt free.

I am the one who committed the crime. Take me instead.

You offer yourself?

Yes! Yes! I offer myself as the sacrifice. I am corrupt, selfish, unworthy. Still, I beg that you accept.

You are unworthy. And what you offer is not enough.

Please, I beg you. I pray to you. Show that heaven can be merciful. Take me.

Silence. Inside him, silence, where the dragon's voice should be. Outside, the shrieking of the wind. Please, he thought. Please.

Then, at last, one word, grudging: *Maybe.*

Maybe?

Maybe heaven will accept your life instead of your son's. There are no promises, human.

Maybe. In the end, all any mortal human being had. There were no guarantees. There never had been.

Maybe. Maybe he would give his life and it would be for nothing.

But maybe it wouldn't.

Chang took Gordon's hand. "I love you," he said, and unbuckled his seat belt. The wind in the cabin had died down a little. Had they descended that much? He stood up, stepped past Gordon.

The wind took him.

Behind him, a child's voice, screaming his name.

Around him, clouds. The glare of lightning, the bellow of thunder. All was gray fog.

He had been too late to see, too late to understand. Such a little thing, to be too late.

The clouds were above him now. Below, the Pacific, gray with rain, the islands scattered brown and green and black across it.

And echoing through the emptiness, through the wind that shrieked past his ears, a voice. A voice like the wind, sibilant and cold. *Heaven is merciful, human. Go in peace.*

The sun came out, turning the ocean to turquoise and silver, the islands to emerald jewels.

He fell to meet them. ❧

The true call of the wild can be heard only by those who are willing to listen closely.

GECKOS

BY CARRIE RICHERSON
Illustration by Alan M. Clark

THE TINY, PINK LIZARD SITS ON Katie's palm like a bejeweled Tiffany creation. Its sides puff rapidly in and out with its breathing; swallowing motions ripple through the loose skin of its gullet. The lizard's splayed toes grip Katie's hand with what seem to be large, adhesive pads below tiny claws. The fourth digit of each foot is the longest. At rest like this, the lizard's belly lies flat against Katie's palm. It feels cool and dry. The lizard is just over two inches long from the tip of its snout to the tip of its fat, blunt tail.

Slowly Katie reaches for the magnifying glass. Her guest waits patiently. An enormous, lidless eye gazes back at her through the glass. Round pupil stares into vertical pupil, and it is round pupil that blinks first. The scales are a bright pink color and cover every part of the animal Katie can see except for the eyes and the eardrums set flat to the skin. The scales form whorls around the tail, and there is a fold along the side of the lizard where the belly skin and scales seem to overlap the back scales. The magnifier shows her irregular, small, dark spots buried in the pink ground color.

As she watches, the lizard opens its mouth and slowly extends a short, thick tongue. It is so pale a pink as to be almost white, but the oral cavity is a deep crimson. The tongue has a hint of bifurcation at its tip; the lizard flicks it against Katie's palm and pulls it back in. Katie decides she has been tasted.

Without thinking, she shifts position slightly, and





her guest is gone. She doesn't even see the leavetaking, it happens so fast. Disappointed, she looks about to see where it went. A twitch of movement catches the corner of her eye. There, on the end of the sofa. The lizard freezes as Katie spies it. She holds very still. Another twitch, and the lizard is on the bookcase, effortlessly clinging to the smooth, vertical side. Katie blinks, and the lizard is on the top shelf.

The lizard pumps itself up and down on its front legs, and Katie expects it to inflate its throat sack as she has seen anoles do in the garden. Instead the lizard opens that blood-blister cavern of a mouth and trills at her. It is a surprisingly large sound for so tiny a singer. The note seems to vibrate through the room. The lizard closes its mouth and cocks its head to one side. Katie feels a response is called for. She hums a note she thinks she can hit, then opens her mouth and sings it, full-throated. The lizard trills on top of her, the same note. Startled, she stops. The lizard stops, too. She tries a different note; the lizard matches it. They continue the duet for several minutes, until Katie tires of the game. The lizard seems to wait for Katie to continue. When she remains silent, it trills one last time, a note that sounds mournful to Katie, and disappears behind the books. Katie shrugs and returns to the journal entry the lizard had interrupted by climbing up on her hand.

MAY 3: ROSS DIDN'T WARN ME ABOUT THE lizards when he offered to let me housesit for him here in San Antonio while he's in Europe this summer. I don't mind, really. I expected a few trade-offs for the privilege of getting out of that cramped, expensive apartment in Austin. Not getting that Dobie Paisano Fellowship hurt, but this place almost makes up for it. Ross knows how much writing this novel means to me. I'm lucky to have such a sweetie for an ex.

(From the journal and other unpublished papers of Katryn Taylor O'Connell. Quoted by permission of the Estate of Katryn Taylor O'Connell, Ross Kilpatrick O'Connell, Executor.)

THE HOUSE KATIE IS STAYING IN IS AN IDIOSYNCRATIC EXAMPLE OF Texas frontier architecture, misplaced to the twentieth century. It is an unpretentious limestone rectangle at the end of a cul-de-sac on the bank of the San Antonio River, at the edge of the King William Historical District, not far from downtown. The house is a straight shot from one end to the other—bedroom, living room, bath, kitchen, another bedroom—with lots of windows on both sides of the long axis and deep overhangs on the porches. The thick limestone walls and saltillo tile floors help the house resist the fierce San Antonio summers. There is no air conditioning. Katie knows this is one of the trade-offs she will have to accommodate.

Along the opposite bank of the river, two- and three-story Victorian manses, backed by large lawns and carriage houses, vie for historic plaques with the occasional O'Neill Ford design. On this side of the river, the neighborhood is shabbier, sliding in the space of a few blocks from the clean but under-maintained houses of the working poor to the slums of the barrio. The walkways of a riverbank park wind past only a few feet from the house's back porch. During the days, joggers and dogwalkers trot past. At night, lovers stroll and whisper under the cypresses. The flood-controlled river flows sluggishly through its concrete channel, exhaling a moist breath of stale mud and floating trash.

A young Latino with little English comes once every week to mow the ever-vigorous lawn and trim back the masses of bougainvillea and wisteria that threaten to bury the house. He is paid automatically by Ross's bank; Katie offers him lemonade and practices her fragmentary Spanish on him. He is respectful, hard-working, and unobtrusive.

The neighborhood is quiet; most of Katie's neighbors are elderly, and there are few children to disturb the peace. Katie spends her days in a happy fog of writing and research.

MAY 6: SUMMER IS ALREADY HERE. IT'S EVEN HOTTER AND MORE humid than I expected, probably because I am right on the river. I did *expect more bugs, because of the river, but I haven't seen a cockroach since I moved in. Now I know why.*

Night before last, I got up about three to use the bathroom, flipped on the light, and surprised one of my pink lizards with a still-wiggling waterbug in his jaws. The cockroach was almost as large as the pink guy, who froze when the light came on, and then shot behind a cabinet, without ever letting go of his captive.

Last night I went searching with a flashlight and found them all over the place. They're geckos, I think, even though I haven't found a picture to match them in the field guides at the library. I made the mistake of mentioning them to the old lady next door. "Lizards?" She seemed baffled. "Pink lizards?" She looked at me like I had suddenly sprouted two heads.

I don't care if she thinks I've been ingesting too many worms with my tequila—I'm just grateful to have these pink bug-hunters around. They're much cheaper and healthier than Orkin. I intend to make myself a very good neighbor.

I looked through my notes this morning. It was a leap of faith, quitting a steady job to write full time, but this novel is going to be worth it.

THE DAYS GROW LONGER, HOTTER, STICKIER. KATIE MAKES A HABIT of waking before dawn, working through the morning, then sleeping again until late afternoon. On the worst days, she takes the bus downtown to the library and barricades herself behind a stack of books on the Texas frontier, Plains Indians, and Comanche and Kiowa folklore. The air conditioning is heaven.

*MAY 10: WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT THE "FRONTIER"? Most people think of it as a place, a long, ragged line marking the westward expansion of European-descended settlers across the nascent United States. I'm one of those rarities: a native Texan. I grew up thinking of the frontier as some*thing, *some* place *of endless shoot 'em-ups, settlers versus savages. How naive.*

It must have been Ross's friend Duncan, the chemist, with his talk of chemical reactions at "boundary layers," who first started me to thinking about the frontier as a tension, a dynamic, rather than a place. Two, sometimes many, civilizations collided, reacted, mutated, changed *at the boundary layer we call the frontier. Bonds were broken, other bonds forged. States of mind and energy were irrevocably altered. To live on the frontier required a certain adaptability, a taste for change. No one could stay there for long and not be affected.*

Cynthia Ann Parker was one of the most famous of the affected. She has fascinated me from the time I first heard about her in history class. For so notable a figure in Texas history, we know very little about her, and nothing from her own account. I want to tell her story as she would have told it.

AFTER A FEW MORE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PINK LIZARDS, KATIE sets herself the task of identifying them. The public library's field guides to lizards and snakes do not help; nor the books on the natural history of lizards that she consults in the libraries of Trinity University and Our Lady of the Lake College. Frustrated and stubborn, she tracks down a herpetologist at Trinity at lunch time one day and explains her problem.

"Pink?" Dr. Fisher frowns doubtfully and rubs his nearly bald head. He moves across the crowded office and finds the book he wants at the bottom of a stack of texts teetering on a chair. While he flips pages, Katie examines the room. The skin of a diamondback rattlesnake, longer than Katie is tall, is mounted on the wall. Katie quickly counts the attached rattles: sixteen. Along one wall several terraria contain sand, gravel, and rock-capped burrows. Katie cannot see any inhabitants, but each enclosure bears a stern warning taped to the glass: WARNING: STATE PERMIT *REQUIRED* TO TAKE OR HANDLE TEXAS HORNED LIZARDS (PHRYNOSOMA).

"Ah, here it is." Dr. Fisher puts the open book down on the desk facing Katie. "The house gecko. Native to the Mediterranean countries originally, but it's hitchhiked all over the world now. I know we have them in San Antonio."

The picture is one she has seen in the library field guides. The body conformation, stubby tail, and splayed feet with sticky toe

pads match her pink friends, but the house gecko is supposed to be larger, up to five inches long, and to display a pattern of dark stipples on a light tan background.

She shakes her head. "No. Smaller. And pink, not tan. Bright pink."

"Are you sure?" Dr. Fisher peers at her over his glasses. "You know, the pinkish color could be just that the skin is thin enough for you to see blood and muscle through it. Like shining a light through your earlobe."

"*Bright* pink." Katie repeats. "And the inside of the mouth is blood-red."

Dr. Fisher harrumphs and goes to stand in front of his bookshelf, hands on his hips. He is wearing shorts, a reasonable concession to the heat, and Katie notices fresh briar scratches above his boots. His legs are very hairy, in a way that reminds Katie of Ross. Ross is black Irish, from his bushy beard and bristly eyebrows to his glossy, fly-away curls and the wads of fur across his chest and belly. She used to call him her teddy bear. Now she misses her ex-husband with a pang that stabs from her heart to her crotch.

Dr. Fisher reshelves a book and shrugs. "I can't find anything like you describe in Van Denburgh or Camp. Could you trap a few and bring them to me? The morphology and internal anatomy should be conclusive, but if I can't match them, maybe you'll wind up with a new species or variant named after you."

Katie mumbles a vague assent, but inwardly she is horrified at the thought of her bug-hunting allies flayed open on a dissecting board or caged forever like the horned lizards. She doubts a state permit would be forthcoming to protect her friends.

Driving to the house—Ross's house, she reminds herself—she continues to think about him. They are better friends now than during the dying stages of their marriage, when the bickering and sniping had become boring habits that neither could break. Even after Ross moved down to San Antonio to live in the house his great-aunt had willed to him, he and Katie always had lunch or dinner together when he came to Austin on business. She realizes she has come to take their friendship for granted in her life, as once she took her marriage for granted. She hasn't dated, not a real *date*—just movies or a dutch dinner with another teacher—in the two years since the divorce. She has claimed, to her married friends, to be well-content at being out of the rat race of the relationship wars. Now she sees it has been simple fear that has steered her course.

Back at the house, she wanders through the rooms touching things, Ross's things. She caresses the smooth sides of a blood-red glass goblet. She and Ross had watched it pulled as a molten lump from the foundry at Fire Island Hot Glass in Austin, watched it mouth-blown to its present, prefect curve. She'd seen the look of mute longing in Ross's eyes and bought it for him as an early birthday present.

On the wall in the bedroom, Ross has hung the Navajo-patterned saddle blanket they bought on a trip to the Grand Canyon. It used to lie folded atop the cedar chest that sat at the foot of their bed. On icy winter mornings, when Ross would dash outside for wood for the woodstove, he would sometimes grab the saddle blanket to wrap around his nakedness. Back inside he would be laughing, red-faced, and she would wrap herself around his goose-bumped shoulders, and the blanket around them both, as he knelt in front of the stove bringing fire to the cold world like Prometheus. She buries her nose in the blanket's wooly softness: faint traces of moth balls, wet sheep, old smoke. But nothing of Ross. Nothing of the manly stink that clung to all that hair, even after a shower, and that could always rouse her.

Goblet. Blanket. Books. Art print. These things used to be part of her life too. She misses them, not out of greed, or even for their intrinsic beauty, but for what she was then: Secure. Loved. Not alone.

A time for choices, she thinks. After the summer is over and the housesitting is done, and she is back in Austin. Time for a new direction in her life.

MAY 18: HERE IS WHAT WE KNOW (OR THINK WE KNOW): CYNTHIA ANN Parker was about nine years old when she was captured by a raiding party of Caddos and Comanches on May 19, 1836, at the family compound of Parker's Fort. Her younger brother John and two older women were also taken. Eventually all but Cynthia were ransomed and returned to their families. Cynthia was traded or sold to the Kwahedi Comanches and lived with them for twenty-four years. Her presence among the Indians was well-known; many times whites tried to contact her or buy her back, but Cynthia refused to meet with them. She married Chief Peta Nocona and bore him a daughter and two sons, one of whom was the last great Comanche war chief, Quanah. She was forcibly "rescued," with her infant daughter, by the whites in 1860, at age 34, during the battle of Pease River; repatriated to Texas; and placed in the custody of another brother, Silas.

When she was rescued, Cynthia had lost all her English and, apparently, all memory of growing up as a white settler. She considered herself Comanche to the last and always sought to return to "her" people. She attempted escape many times. Her daughter Topasannah (Prairie Flower) died in 1864; Cynthia died shortly thereafter.

And here is what, after all my research, I still don't know: Cynthia's Comanche name. So fundamental a part of her identity, and no one has recorded it. How she went from terrified captive to assimilated Kwahedi. How Peta Nocono won her heart. The pride she must have felt in her sons. The fear she must have felt for her daughter at the hands of whites. Her despair at being forever separated from the only "home" she could remember.

Cynthia didn't leave a record of her version of events. She was one of the frontier's most famous Indian captives, in both senses, and I don't know what she felt. When was that moment of transformation from settler into so-called savage? When did the alien become familiar, so that the unacceptable could become normal?

The heat still bothers me sometimes, but I think I'm getting over my love affair with air conditioning.

IN THE MORNINGS, WHEN SHE GOES TO SHOWER IN A sunken tub beautifully paved with hand-painted Mexican tiles, Katie has to be careful not to drown the geckos who have come in the night to lap up drops and to cool themselves. They are impossible to spot against tiles even more gaudy than themselves, so she has learned to run an inch of cool water into the tub and scoop out the floaters. Placed on the tub side, they drip and shine for a moment, then dash madly for the nearest dark crevice. She wonders if they tell fabulous tales to their brethren of scale-raising escapes from the Deluge and the Goliath.

MAY 25: I FINISHED ANOTHER SECTION OF THE OUTLINE LAST NIGHT, late, and went straight to bed, but I was keyed up from the writing, and it was too hot to sleep. After I tossed for a while, I gave it up, got a glass and a bottle of tequila from the freezer, and went to sit in the living room. I was stark naked, so I didn't turn on any lights—just sat there in the dark, drinking and sweating, listening to the river gurgle and slap out back.

All of a sudden, something ran across my leg. Ross warned me that scorpions love old rock houses, so somehow I managed not to jump out of my skin. I reached over very slowly and turned on the lamp. Fortunately it turned out to be just one of the geckos.

The light made him blink, but he didn't run away. Instead he sat back and began to sing. That's the only thing I can call it. It was trilling and chirping and a sort of whispery barking. But it was rhythmical and modulated, nonrepetitive. I sat entranced for I don't know how long.

When he stopped, I sang right back to him. Nursery rhymes, Joni Mitchell, old show tunes, top 40, some Cris Williamson—everything I could think of, until I was hoarse. That was near dawn. I put out a finger and he climbed up on it, as daring as you please. I lifted him up right in front of my bleary eyes and said, "That's all for tonight, man. Got no voice left." Don't know if he understood, but when I put him down, he took off.

KATIE SLEEPS UNTIL LATE AFTERNOON. WHEN SHE STAGGERS TO THE bathroom, she finds six fat dead beetles, arranged in a precise line, by the tub. She gathers them into the trash and wonders if they are a figment of her hangover.

MAY 31: THE THUNDERSTORM WE HAD LAST NIGHT COOLED THE AIR down to a manageable temperature before I went to bed. I loved it, but the geckos apparently didn't. I woke in the night covered with dozens of the tiny

fellows. They must have coveted my body warmth. (I was sleeping naked, as I usually do. It wasn't that *cool.)*

Once something like that would have sent me into screaming hysterics. I just went back to sleep. Must be getting mellow in my old age.

Strangest thing, though. I was dreaming—at least I think *it was a dream—that they were all singing to me in my sleep. And the oddest part was that, in the dream, I could understand their song.*

KATIE WONDERS WHAT KIND OF MYTHIC LITERATURE PINK GECKOS might have. How might they record it? Do they leave gnawed traceries of script upon seed husks, as ants might? Do they use those clever, splayed toes with their huge pads to create some lizard version of cuneiform or braille? If she were to crawl into the attic with a magnifying glass, would she find tiny testaments upon the roof planks, including references to herself as god of the netherworld?

JUNE 2: A NEW GECKO HAS SHOWN UP, VERY DIFFERENT. I CALL HIM Petey. He is three times larger than any of his fellows, but hard used: his skin hangs in loose folds; he is missing one eye and several toes. Perhaps he is merely a survivor, an elder gecko. Perhaps all of them grow to this size if they live long enough. If they survive birds and cats and snakes and other lizards.

Petey rides around on my shoulder all day long, except while I shower. If I leave the house, I put him on a shelf, and he's right there when I come back. He's still on my shoulder when I go to bed at night, and he whispers to me all night long, all through my dreams. I dream wonderful colors—not just pinks: violets, blues, exotic greens. Indistinct shapes, moving. And words. Words I am starting to understand.

THE NEXT TIME A GIFT OF BEETLES ARRIVES, KATIE doesn't have the heart to refuse them. Cautiously she tastes one. It has a rich, slightly bitter flavor, like fine chocolate. She crunches the rest with relish.

One night she wakes needing to urinate. Carefully dislodging the many lizards all over her body takes time, and her need is urgent by the time she stumbles down the hall. Petey is riding on her shoulder, as usual. Suddenly he hisses loudly and launches himself down her front. She freezes in place, afraid of stepping on him in the dark. A scuttling, clicking, rasping tumult breaks out somewhere in front of her. She fumbles the light on and sees Petey attacking a large scorpion directly in her path. Again and again Petey dashes forward to snap at the scorpion's front, then leaps backward just in time to avoid the lashing stinger-tipped tail.

Before Katie can determine how to help, it is over. Petey grabs the scorpion in his jaws and crushes its carapace. In its death throes, the arachnid repeatedly stings the gecko, but Petey does not let go until the body stops thrashing. Then he shakes it hard, like a dog with a squirrel, and drops the enemy at Katie's feet.

Katie gets a wad of tissues, scoops up the dead scorpion, relieves her bladder, and flushes all down the toilet. By the time she returns to the hall, Petey is staggering in circles. She doesn't know what to do to help. She calls several veterinarians' emergency numbers, but the answering services decide that her frantic questions are the product of a hoax or a four A.M. drunk, and no one calls her back. Petey is getting weaker, the normally rapid bellowing of his sides has slowed. In desperation she carries him back to the mass of smaller geckos in her bed. They huddle around him, tasting his skin and hers with their tongues and chirping to one another. A knot of the small lizards lifts Petey on their backs and dashes away with him. Katie tries to follow but loses track of them behind the furniture. It is as though they have slipped into a crack and erased it after themselves.

She cries until she is numb, and then falls into an exhausted sleep. When she wakes it is full day. And a gecko the size of a cocker spaniel is sitting beside her bed.

She stares at it blearily, her soggy brain refusing to admit there is anything wrong with this picture. "Petey?"

In perfect English the gecko replies, "He is being healed. He will return in a few days. Meanwhile, I have been sent to protect you."

"Oh." Katie blinks at the lizard. Dream. Right. "OK." She rolls over and goes back to sleep.

A GECKO THE SIZE OF A DOG IS IMPOSSIBLE, BUT KATIE DECLINES TO let the fact of her delusion get her down. She christens this one Elijah. He does not, of course, speak English; the illusion that she can understand his chirps, trills, and hisses is, to Katie, yet one more sign of her dementia. He is good company, though, and her writing is going so well that she thinks, What's a little hallucination among friends? When she sits at her desk to write, Elijah lies with his head pillowed on her foot. At times, when she stares into midair waiting for the next word to come, she finds herself scratching under his jaw with her toe. Elijah hisses with pleasure at the attention.

Petey does return, as promised, on the fifth day after the scorpion attack. He looks terrible. He is much thinner, and the shock has propelled him into moult. Large patches of cloudy pink scales peel off his body, leaving smooth, shiny, hot pink, new scales. He helps the process along by rubbing on furniture and against Katie's body, and by pulling at the loose skin with his claws and teeth. What he pulls loose, he eats. Katie wonders if it is just a habit, or if the dead skin has some nutritive value. He is too weak still to hunt for Katie; Elijah hunts for them both, bringing fat beetles, cockroaches, and juicy caterpillars for Katie, and grubs and moths for Petey. Katie also feeds him bits of raw hamburger and cottage cheese. It is weeks before he begins to look like his old, rascally self again.

"YOU SAID PETEY WAS BEING HEALED. WHO HEALED HIM?" SHE ASKS Elijah one day.

He scratches the loose skin of his armpit with the long, clever toe of his hind foot. "Our king. He has the healing touch."

"Your king? I never knew you had a leader."

Elijah makes the soft barking sound she knows signals amusement. "You didn't ask."

"Do all of you have the 'healing touch'?"

"No. In my kind, the small ones, the blood is diluted. We can only soothe, and protect."

"What kind is your king, then?"

Elijah stares at her for a long moment, that unblinking, yellow, *alien* stare that seems to know her to her roots. His chirp drops to a lower register. "He is god."

She considers that for a time. "Can you describe your god for me?"

Elijah barks again and his eyes glitter gold. "Can you describe your *human* god for me?"

"Can your king heal other beings than lizards? Could he heal humans? What is the way to find him?"

Elijah trills a low, mournful note. "You cannot. Humans have closed all the ways."

JUNE 15: GECKOS LIVE IN THE CRACKS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE. DO humans live in the cracks of God's existence?

KATIE IS REALLY LOST IN HER WRITING NOW. SHE RARELY LEAVES THE house anymore and often neglects to dress. When she rises in the morning, she goes straight to her desk and writes until the words run dry, then she sleeps or listens to music until she is inspired again. Sometimes her own rank smell reminds her to bathe. Her fine, light brown hair has grown long and limp in the unremitting humidity; she finds the sticky mass of it oppressive but doesn't want to take the time to find a hairdresser, so she chops it off in uneven hanks.

She is so absorbed that she becomes absent-minded, loses things from one room to the next. One day, after tearing the house apart, she finds her thesaurus in the freezer next to the tequila, and the ice tray on the bookshelf, where it has created a pool of condensation and soaked several of Ross's history textbooks. She makes a note to pull them out of the shelf and leave them open to dry, then forgets.

The heat of June and July is like a weight on Katie's chest, making it difficult to breathe. It leaves her with no appetite; she grows thinner, and Elijah nags her to eat and tempts her with the most succulent catches from his nighttime forays. She does eat some, to please

him. The bitter and musky tastes are more appealing than most human food. The thought of animal flesh makes her gag; one day she opens the refrigerator in search of cold water and finds velvety green hamburger, clotted milk, and fuzzy blue cheese. She cleans out the fridge and throws everything into the trash, but it is another week before she remembers to take the trash out to the curb for collection.

JULY 10: MUST REMEMBER TO ASK JUAN TO CHECK FOR POISON IVY IN the althea beds. I seem to have picked up some kind of rash on my hands and feet. Tiny blisters and red, peeling skin along my fingers and toes. It's not painful, and I can still type, so I'm not going to spend the money on a doctor unless it gets worse. I found some calamine lotion in Ross's medicine chest—it's what Mom always used on my poison ivy when I was little.

I'm almost finished with Chapter 10 now, and I can feel the book unfolding inside me like one of those clever Chinese boxes. The frontier is within us all, every day.

JULY 21: SOME OF THE YOUNGER GECKOS HAVE INVENTED A NEW GAME. They bite down on my skin and dangle for hours from my earlobes, nipples, the curve of my jaw, the skin under my ribs. The object of the game seems to be who can hang on longest. It doesn't hurt—their teeth are just little nubs. They feel like fat, cold dewdrops, and I'm forever having to catch one when he falls off. Environmental jewelry—très avant.

Petey doesn't approve. He acts like the young guys are gecko juvenile delinquents. Hey, I've got it: gecko gangs. The Four-Runners. No, the Lounge Lizards.

THE RASH SPREADS OVER KATIE'S HANDS AND UP HER ARMS, BUT IT still doesn't hurt, so she has no attention to spare for it. But something else begins to distract her. She starts having chills and fevers at night, even in the smothering heat. When the chills are upon her, and she shivers convulsively, the small geckos paste themselves against her baking flesh and soak up the heat coming off her in waves. When the fevers break, and stinking sweat floods from her pores, the geckos lap it up eagerly.

After several days, her fever is spiking so high Katie finally understands that she is truly ill, but by then she is too weak to get to a doctor. Dizzy and nauseated, she barely makes it to the bathroom before the diarrhea rips through her, leaving her more chilled than before. She forgets there is a phone, forgets 9-1-1; all she wants is to be warm as her teeth chatter and the fever roasts her bones to powder. She staggers into the living room, looking for the warmest place in the ovenlike house. Heat rises, she remembers dimly. She climbs to the top of the built-in bookshelf, wedges herself in under the ceiling among the dust and cobwebs and spider egg cases. There she is almost warm enough. And there she sleeps, for a day and a night and another day. And while she sleeps, she dreams.

An eye, vaster than the cosmos, regards her. The vertical pupil is the same black that exists between stars, and the iris is the boiling gold of suns. The eye gazes upon her without pity, without sentiment, without judgment—and somehow that last terrifies Katie even more, because she knows she has nothing with which to bargain. A voice reverberates in her head: "Choose."

When Katie wakes she feels better than she has in weeks. At first she cannot figure out where she is; she almost falls off the shelf to the floor eight feet below. She climbs down carefully, wondering what possessed her to hide in such a hot, airless place.

She is shocked by what she sees in the mirror. Cobwebs and dust bunnies are matted into her greasy hair and streaked across her face and body. She looks as fearfully thin as Petey did after his illness, and the rash has spread across her belly and breasts. Bath, she thinks. I need a bath. While she soaks in the tub she relates her dream to Elijah, who, with Petey, stood faithful watch over her during her fever. He pronounces it a true dream, but will not explain.

Katie goes on a campaign of cleaning. Laundry goes in the washer, weeks'-old dirty dishes in the sink get scrubbed. She trims at the uneven spikes of her hair, then gives up and goes to the phone book to locate a nearby hair salon. The answering machine is blinking.

The message is from Ross, and is date-stamped four days ago. "Katie, are you all right? My letters have been coming back from the post office marked 'unable to deliver.'" The voice is faint and sleety with static, as though Ross were communicating from the Beyond. "If you decided you couldn't take the lack of air conditioning and went back to Austin, I wish you'd let me know. I'm still at the address in Oberstdorf that I left you. This system installation won't be finished till the end of the month, so if you get this, please write or phone and let me know you're OK. OK, dear?"

When she takes out the trash and checks the mailbox, she finds two post cards and a letter, all from Ross, all wondering why she hasn't responded to his earlier posts. She writes him immediately, apologizing for worrying him and pleading irregular mail delivery and her own distraction with the novel as her excuses. After she takes the note to the post office, she has her hair done and treats herself to sauerbraten and birch beer at Schilo's, in honor of Ross's Bavarian assignment.

It is late when she finishes her cleaning. The house shines from her efforts. Katie shines, especially where the skin peeling from her fingers has left healthy pink tissue beneath.

"I feel great," she tells Petey and Elijah. "Let's dance."

She tunes the radio to an oldies station and grooves to Hendrix and Morrison in the middle of the living room. "Hey, guys—it's the Lizard King himself!" Petey, plastered to her shoulder, hisses in indignation, but Elijah barks his mirth and prances with soulful sophistication about her feet. The small geckos line up on the bookshelves and trill and sway to the music like a Greek chorus. If she closes her eyes, it is 1969 again, the Summer of Love, and she is eighteen again. Never grow old. Never die.

"May I have this dance?"

He is a way cool dude, this tall, bright, handsome stranger. She laces her fingers between his and they swing each other about the floor. Dry slitherings pursue them. His throat is as soft and smooth as watered silk against her cheek during the slow dances. Later, when they retire to fresh sheets perfumed with fabric softener, his weight on her back is cold and heavy, but their sex is as hot and lusty as any mammalian act.

JULY 31: I SHALL CALL HIM JOHN. HE CALLS ME "THE MOTHER of his children." Far-out sense of humor—I like that in a man. Or a lizard.

(Executor's note: From this point on, Katryn O'Connell's journal increasingly uses a private code consisting of dots, dashes, and vergules. Few English words appear, and those are frequently misspelled or trail off unfinished. All attempts at translation have so far failed.—Ross Kilpatrick O'Connell)

KATIE LIES PROPPED ON ONE ELBOW, SLOWLY STROKING THE FINE, pale pink scales of John's belly. She is always amazed at how loosely his skin seems to drape over his form. It gives predators little purchase when they bite, he explains, curling sideways so she can scratch along his lateral fold. Even now, relaxed as he is after lovemaking, his eyes are wide-open. She wonders what it is like never to be able to shut out the sight of the world.

On the underside of his hind legs, a pale, comblike structure of hardened secretions has formed. John tells her that this is normal during mating season. She traces the smooth, dry fringe, then the swirls of scale patterns around the base of his tail and his cloaca. John hisses, and she hisses right back at him as one of his hemipenes everts from the cloaca and stiffens. When he mounts her, he cannot wrap his tail around hers as he would with a female gecko; he curls it around Katie's leg instead.

He takes her twice, in quick succession, using each of his hemipenes in turn. She likes his stamina. No man has ever satisfied her like this. And if she still wants more—well, there is always that clever, notched tongue.

She is drowsing next to John, enjoying his coolness as he enjoys her warmth, when the house shudders to a thunderous crash that

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THE FROG PRINCE

BY GAHAN WILSON

Illustration by Michael Dubisch

"AH, SO AGAIN THE SAME DREAM," sighed Doctor Neiman, without any trace of accusation, of course, making a note among many other notes in his notebook. "Always the same dream."

Frog rolled the tiniest bit to the right on the couch, selecting another part of the ceiling to look at, the part with the crack which ran out of the edging of plaster flowers like a questing tendril, perhaps his favorite part.

He was aware that the continuing emanation of sweat from his armpits was once again soaking itself into the twin bunching of his shirt underneath the tweed jacket, making the material into two hard, swelling, highly uncomfortable lumps.

There was so much moisture in him! Saliva, as always, had nearly filled his



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The wide, round, golden bulging of his eyes with their long black slits strained past aching to absorb the sight of this gorgeousness as it came nearer and nearer, and he sank into a trance far, far deeper than his tiny pond.

mouth and he would soon have to swallow, silently, as silently as possible, since Doctor Neiman often incorporated Frog's frequent gulpings into his little analytical summations near the ends of their sessions. Frog always felt particularly vulnerable when it came to gulpings. With reason, of course, with reason.

And then there was the constant wetness in his eyes which would increase and brim and finally spill over the edges of his heavy, puffy lids and roll down his round, pale cheeks each and every time he spoke or thought of sad or moving things, which was often. Not to mention the constant moisture on his palms which turned them into little, pale suction cups and made them cling alarmingly to the soft leather of the couch, or the ever renewing dampness of his socks so that the unending process of evaporation taking place continued to bring uncomfortable and unnerving coolness to the wide bottoms of his feet.

Sometimes, lying there, he wondered if he was making visible rivulets and pools beneath himself on the surface of the couch. Sometimes he wondered if it had got so bad it was running off the couch's sides and darkening the thick Oriental carpet, and that only Doctor Neiman's professional politeness was preventing him from making some totally understandable comment about the potential damage this flood of sweat and tears and drool—yes, even drool!—represented to his property.

Again and again he would turn on the couch—always just the tiniest little bit—and think these thoughts, and each time he moved he would anticipate and listen, with repressed winces, for the squishings and squelchings which he never heard, thank God!

But when he finally rose to leave at the end of his session and was not able to resist the impulse to look back down at the couch and see if the damage done by the flood of moisture from his round body was anywhere near as bad as his imagination conjured, he would observe, with perhaps the smallest wisp of disappointment, that the couch had not been reduced to a sodden, dripping mass, that it seemed startlingly dry, and that the only visible trace of all that steady gushing seemed to be a faint dampness on the disposable paper cover on the pillow—a dim round spot representing his head with a short, wide, vertical tail below it representing his neck, the whole thing vaguely suggesting a sun or moon reflected in water more or less as it would be done if painted by Edward Munch.

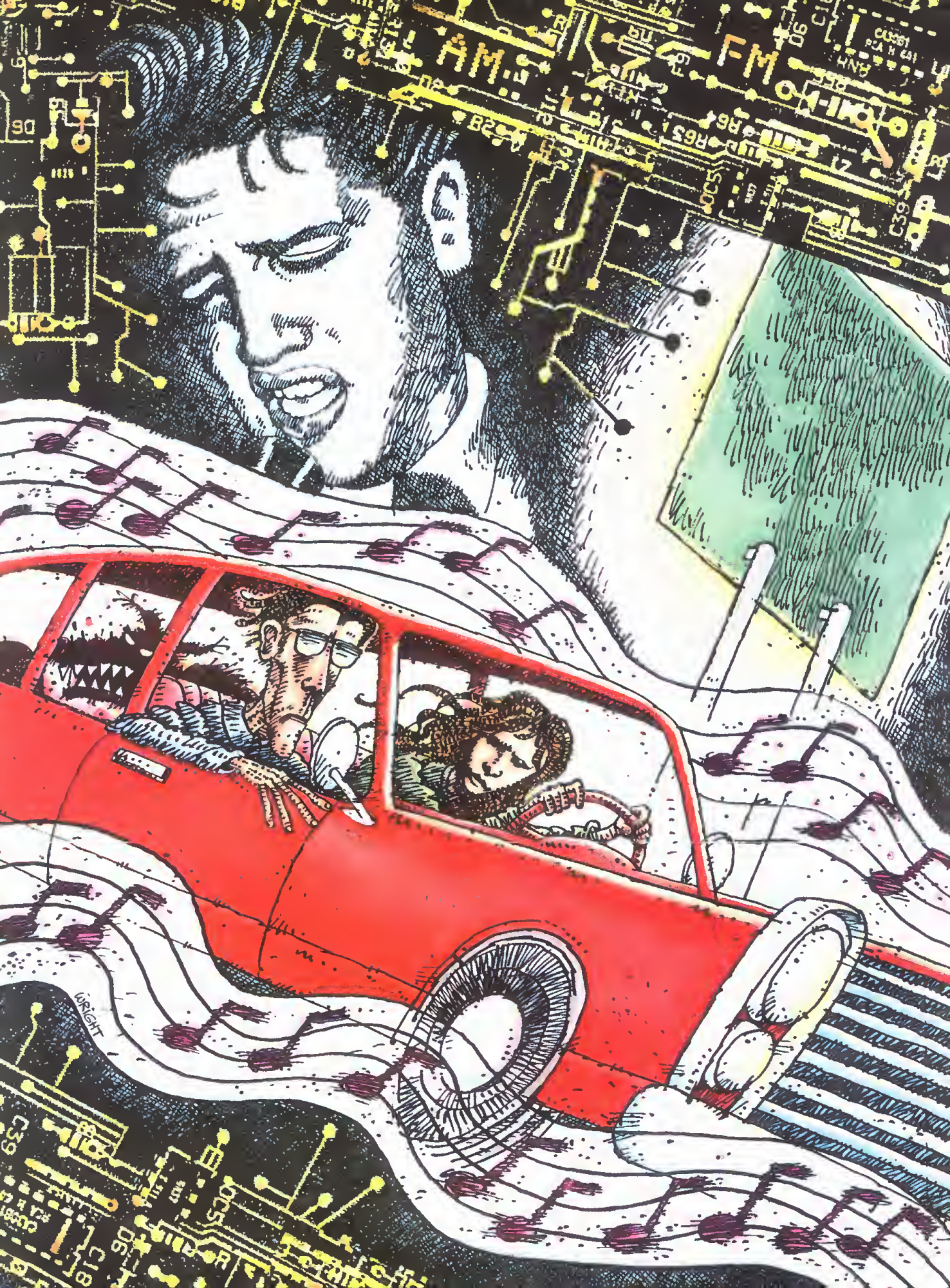


"The king in your dream," Doctor Neiman said, frowning and making another note, perhaps underlining it. "You say you feel he is your father?"

His father, yes! His father. Holding him high in his heavy, hard metal gauntlets, holding him over the battlements of the topmost tower so they could look down upon their kingdom together and see the glinting of gold, the long banners flapping, the dust rising from the wide earth road and settling on the gaudy wrappings of the horses; holding him high so he could clearly hear the trumpets, the loving cheers from the crowd, the drumbeats! The king had been, indeed, his father.

But then had come the spell, and the separation, and the desperate, unsuccessful hunting which had once come so close, so terribly close that he had felt the water shaking, the whole pool trembling, as the hooves pounded the soft earth of its round shore, could even see the ripples caused by near-

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AM
FM
WRIGHT

The "magic of the open road" is far more than a handy cliché. It may be the only thing standing between us and a steady diet of Barry Manilow.

RADIOMANCER AND BUBBLEGUM

BY S.N. DYER

Illustration by Mike Wright

I'M ON THE INTERSTATE, ZEN-DRIVING FASTER THAN my headlights can see, and all I know is it's dark, and white lights come at me and red go away. I'm covering more in an hour than my ox-driving, gun-toting, whiskey-wishing ancestors could make in a week. I'm somewhere between New York and California; don't know where, don't care.

Then the sky begins to pink up in the rearview mirror, and pretty soon everything overhead is lemon and peach. I can see corn into infinity on either side of the road.

"I guess we're still in Kansas, Toto," I say to the back seat. Which growls back.

There are still stars out; light comes up like a busy theater where they want you to leave while the credits are still rolling. I see him at the side of the road. Not the first guy, who's your typical hitchhiker with knapsack and just-out-of-prison clothes and just-out-of-prison-but-you-can-trust-me smile and cardboard placard with his destination in felt pen. No, the next guy, denim faded so bad it looks white. Who just stands with hands in pockets and (you're certain) eyes closed behind the mirror shades. He's singing.

I pull over, spitting gravel, then back up and roll down the window.

"Radiomancer?"

He doesn't answer, but gets into the bucket seat. Just-Out-of-Prison looks in the window and puts his hand on the door, all smiles, until the back seat growls at him.

"Nice doggie," he says hopefully, and I floor it.

I wait until I'm back up to speed. The signs are visible now, but not much help. I'm still somewhere between New York and California, but near *Rest Stop* and *Gas and Lodging Ahead*.

Funny. I thought I passed them last night.

I look sideways at my passenger. His skin is leather and nicotine.

"Radiomancer?"

He takes off his shades and looks at me with milky blue eyes like a baby's. "What do you think?"

So I flip on the AM. *I can't drive fifty-five.*

"Guess so," I say.

IT SEEMS LIKE ONLY YESTERDAY, WHICH IT WAS, SORT OF. I WALKED again into the Billiard King's. It should be quiet, just the clink of pool balls and the ping bonk clang of pinball, and the Guitar Wizard picking delta blues in a corner.

Only there's hammering and clunking and swearing. Some guys are dragging out the pinball machines and putting in shiny new video games with raunchy names and movie spins and marvel superheroes.

"What the hell?"

"It's the end of civilization as we know it," says Pinball Wizard. He walks over to where two guys in overalls are wrestling the Cannonball Blaster out to the wrecker's truck. He puts in his quarter; it rolls out the return coin slot back to him as usual. The unplugged game switches on and dings and shrieks as it goes to its doom.

Pinball Wizard wanders over to a bar stool and sits beside Guitar Wizard. They look tired. Now, these guys are *old*. Yeah, I know, at my age even Luke Perry is old, but these dudes are bone-creak, joint-crack, spit-on-the-floor "when-I-was-your-age" old.

"Git outta here, Bubblegum," says Pinball.

"That's a helluva way to say hello."

Guitar Wizard has a guitar on either side, the Les Paul electric he usually plays and the battered dime store acoustic he started on, *Rhonda* carved on her side. He takes up Rhonda and begins to pick.

"This here's 'Talking Apocalypse Blues,'" he says. "Billiard King's gone and given his favor to the videodroids. They be here soon. Guitar Wizard's gonna fight it out with a band's got three chords and a drum machine. They gone blow out his acoustic nerves and ram bad rhythm up the music pathways into his brain so it explodes."

This scares me. "Shit, Guitar, you gotta get out of here!"

"No," adds Pinball. "*You* gotta go. You're our last hope, Bubblegum. We taught you what we know of the Old Magics, and you gotta leave before they get you, too."

"But you'll die!"

Guitar shrugs. "So I'm gonna die, girl. 'Bout time—don't wanna hang around now the party's over. Don't worry none 'bout Pinball. He's just goin' to jail on a morals rap."

"Here," says Pinball, and something tumbles through the air into my hand. His quarter!

"Works on phones and paper machines too," he said. "All outmoded technologies."

"But I can't just leave you...."

They glare at me. "What does the table say?"

So I go sit down and consult one. The pattern is *River Flows Relentlessly Over Rocks*. Not one of my favorites.

I come back. "OK, you're right. What do I do?"

"You'll know."

Guitar Wizard stands suddenly. "I gotta gift too," he says. And hands me Rhonda.

"Shit man." My eyes are welling up. "I don't play."

"Don't need to. Now get the hell out of here. Quick."

I go out, throw the old guitar on the back seat. I'm walking over to the driver's side when someone calls me.

"Hey, Bubblegum."

It's the Billiard King. He used to look like postage-stamp Elvis, but now he's looking more and more like Vegas Elvis, who is everything that's wrong with the Old Way and the harbinger of the New Way.

"Yeah?"

"Don't run, jailbait." Don't know why he calls me that. Times have changed, half my class is pregnant.

"Gimme a reason."

"There's room for you in my kingdom."

I draw up proudly. "I'm a disciple of the Traditional Ways, lard-butt."

"You can learn the New. I'm happy to teach you." He gives a few pelvic thrusts. They make his belly jiggle under the sequins.

"F... off."

"In time, we will," he sneers. "But if you're really leaving, I have a present."

It's actually kinda nice. A gleaming white sewer crocodile, sitting Buddha fashion on its tail, holding a white marijuana plant.

"From the New York urban wizards," he says. "And it's pure chocolate. Worship the Night!"

"In my own way," I say. I get in the car and jam the lock.

He reaches in the window. "We'll talk...."

The back seat lunges at him, or a dog does. Standing, it fills the rear half of the car, scarred-brown-ugly with a collar that says Rhonda.

"All right!" I say, and we drive off. I switch on the radio.

You got a fast car.

"Y'like chocolate, Rhonda?" I ask. She lies down and starts to snooze, so I guess that's *no*. I chuck the statue out the window.

The on ramp to the interstate is ahead.

We've got to make a decision—leave tonight or live and die this way.

I understand suddenly what my gurus want me to do. I have to find the Radiomancer.

I'M STARTING TO FEEL TIRED, DRIVING all night I don't know where, and now this dried up mystic next to me, looking like Marlboro Man beef jerky. In the noon light his complexion is strictly back-side-of-the-moon and his jeans are like cloudy sky with patches of blue to make you nostalgic for better weather.

We've been riding in silence.

"What's your name?" he asks finally.

"You're the wizard, you tell me."

So he switches on the radio. *Sugar, honey honey.*

"Bubblegum?"

It's hard to respect a shaman who sounds so damned puzzled.

"So?"

"Food," he replies.

Sounds good to me. The next off ramp has a couple of tall gas signs looming overhead, one on each side, like you have to choose. But if your allegiance is to the other side, you have to figure how to cross over and remember to get back in the right direction, disturbing the pure meditation of the road.

I pump some regular while the dog snuffles around the dumpster. Then we squint up and down the frontage road, looking for some restaurantlike substance. There's Taco Bell, Wendy's, McDonald's, but we need one of those sit-down road places that all have the same waitress in a beehive hairdo. Either she follows me everywhere, or the Denny's franchise includes waitress clones. We see a place with a big lot and a rural classy name, and you just know that it's where everyone local eats major life events and Sunday after church.

We get a table and ignore the menu. Road food has to be burger, fries, soda and black coffee. You can't drive smooth six-lane blacktop, watch stunted alien trees and flyspeck towns zip by, and then order quiche or catch of the day—it would screw up the magic. But it's OK to ask for lettuce and tomato.

The table has four ashtrays, salt, pepper, sugar, ketchup, three flavors of syrup. A juke box selector hides behind the condiments.

The last occupants have left an empty cup of tea, leaves at the bottom. Radiomancer shoves it at me. "What's it mean?"

This is it. The test. Am I worthy to be his disciple? My entire life building up to this point, insert flash cut montage.

I look in the cup. "Bad luck, man."

He nods. "Why?"

"Tea bag busted."

He leans back, satisfied. The waitress cleans the table, pours coffee, takes our orders.

"Why *Bubblegum*?" he asks finally. "It's the antithesis of a power name. Kinda dumb sounding, too." The waitress drops loaded plates before us: crispy buns, gray burgers with a slice of pickle, limp fries.

I put my hands under the table and feel the lumps of dried up gum. Four, in a square. "The *Circle Angles*," I say. "Order is imposed on spirit...." There's one still sticky in the center.

"Oh shit! Fawn Caught in the Nest by Lions!"

He hears the urgency, tosses a quarter in the jukebox and hits buttons at random.

We gotta get out of this place, if it's the last thing we ever do...

Before we can, two men slide into the booth, trapping us. One has a laptop, the other a Gameboy. They both begin tapping away. A third pulls up a chair.

"Nice weather," says the guy in the chair. They have nerdy faces, couch potato butts, Three Stooges T-shirts. They radiate malevolent power.

"Road's clear," says Radiomancer. I drown my fries in ketchup and act dumb.

"We know what you're after."

"Burger's gettin' cold."

Chairman looks at his henchmen. "They won't help. Bones, Spock, what do I do?"

"Explain to them the gravity of the situation."

"Live and let live."

"As usual, I'm going to go with Spock's advice," Chairman says apologetically.

Bones looks hurt. "I don't know why you even bother to ask me."

I start on my burger. Radiomancer uses mustard. Go figure.

"We know you're looking for it," says Chairman. "Things will go easier on you if you help us."

We shrug.

"Your magic is dying," he continues. "You need powersongs by power groups, but they're a thing of the past. And sampling is undermining the old powersongs."

The geek is right. Sampling cancels the magic; can't sing about loss while the background is a little bit of road-warrior or metal funk. And worse is when a song gets used in a commercial; the power just implodes. Now I hear Hendrix, I see cars; hear Clapton, I smell beer.

"Surrender. We'll bring you into the fold. Join us before the TV."

I take my quarter, feed the juke and let it roll back out. *All we are saying...*

I begin climbing out of the booth. "You Videodroids are nothin'," I say. The music is temporarily weakening them. Truck stops are still power reservoirs of the Old. "You gotta be home with the Tube."

Is give peace a chance.

"We're trapped," hisses Chairman. "I can't move... Bones! Spock! We need to escape!"

"I am trapped as well, sir."

"I'm a Videodroid, not Houdini...."

Then I hear an ominous click. The waitress has switched on a TV. "Freeze! LAPD!"

Chairman jumps to his feet, intent crackling around him like a masked pay cable channel.

"Run for it," cries Radiomancer, and my guru hotfoots it out. "They're picking up the bill," I shout, and the waitress gives us a chance to get to the car. Rhonda is in the dumpster; she dives in the window as I spin out, burrito wrapper in her mouth.

"Now what?"

Radiomancer gives me a whaddayouthink look, so I flip on the radio.

Flying into Los Angeles...

So we head that way. There's a van on the road with us, big old tacky thing with a seascape on the side and opaque windows and a huge antenna. It passes us once and the bumper sticker says *Beam me up, Scotty, there's no intelligent life here,* so I know it's the Videodroids, following us.

ABOUT A DAY LATER THE AIRwaves ask if we know the way to San Jose, so I head north into desert. Interstate driving is the only pure form of American meditation, except maybe the evil kind, zoning out in front of the tube. Having a destination ruins my focus.

The radio is singing *We gotta keep on searching, searching.*

"Relax," says Radiomancer. "Go with the flow. You can know and still quest."

"Thanks. That's a big flipping help." Ambiguity, what a pain in the butt.

So he changes stations, and it's *Let it be.*

Things fall into place. I'm a couple hundred miles into my reverie when I see something yellow and pull off the freeway. It's a restaurant with a single yellow arch and the sign *McGuffins.*

"This is it," I say. The Videodroids pull up beside us.

Strong hands grab me. We're being dragged to the van, Bones with his arm around my neck, Radiomancer struggling with Spock, Rhonda banging her head against the windows, trying to get to us.

Then we're inside, and there's all sorts of blinking lights and gadgets and the sides are covered with TVs all tuned to different channels. The noise is overwhelming, even to me, and hell, I listen to heavy metal.

Chairman smiles. "We have to give you a chance," he says. It seems to be a part of his faith he's not happy about. "Death-traps always have an out." He sneers and hands me a remote control with pulsing colored buttons, no labels.

"Change channels and you're dead. Your only hope is Power."

Then we're locked in, sinking into the wall-to-wall carpeting. All around me Gilligan is being cute but stupid, Beaver is being cute but stupid, Charley's Angels are being cute but stupid and lucky. Every station radiates acquiescence and acceptance.

There's music, too, but one station so easy-listening it drains my will to live, and the other is posturing macho gangsters with a ripped-off baseline that makes me confused and nauseous. I can hear Rhonda scratching at the door, her claws grooving into the metal, but she'll be too late. I'm on the way out—one foot on a banana peel and the other on a skateboard.

And then I realize that there's more to the Old Way than just accepting the music. It's choosing it. I uncurl out of fetal and stare at one set, focus all my thoughts on it, let it suck me in....

The screen says *Classic MTV,* and something old comes on, from the days when people still wrote and played their songs....

Roxanne, you don't have to turn on the red light...

Who the hell are you to give me orders?

Continued on page 84





ROSE AND THORN

The Art of Thomas Canty

BY TERRI WINDLING

OVER THE LAST FIFTEEN years, Thomas Canty has become one of the most accomplished artists in the fantasy field. His luminous work portrays a lifelong commitment to Romanticism and the expression of Romantic ideals through the medium of modern book arts. By holding steadfast to his own iconographic style of book design, his art has had a pervasive influence on the look of modern fantasy publishing.

To appreciate the impact of his work, it is necessary to look at the history of the fantasy genre as a whole. In American publishing, the category of adult "fantasy" fiction is a recent one. Prior to the mid-seventies the category did not exist; when adult fantasy was published at all, it was published under a science fiction logo. Such books were generally in the heroic mode (such as the "Conan" novels of Robert E. Howard), descended from the pulp magazine era, and were written for an audience that was deemed to be largely male. This changed by the end



of the seventies, due to the popularity of Tolkien's works among readers of both genders, and of Lin Carter's *Sign of the Unicorn* series, which brought both classic and original works of highly literate adult fantasy into print. The new, younger generation of fantasists included those who had not come out of the "pulps" or, in many cases, the SF genre at all. Rather, they were writers and artists with backgrounds in folklore, folk music, and mythology, who found in the growing fantasy field a congenial home for works firmly rooted in the mythic and Romantic traditions.

This, then, was the period when Tom first entered the publishing profession: at the point when modern adult fantasy was becoming a distinct category of its own, and when the new generation of fantasists were beginning to make themselves known. He'd earned his art and teaching degree at the Massachusetts College of Art where his roommate was Robert Gould, also an illustrator with an interest in the fantastic. (The tales both tell of their student days are enchanting and hilarious.) The illustration style he favored was clean and modern in its lines, yet paid tribute to the works of such nineteenth century artists as Mucha, Whistler, Waterhouse, and the English Pre-Raphaelite painters. His palette was drawn from the subtle colors of New England, where he'd been born and raised. Permeating his work was a solid grounding in myth, folklore, and literature.

Tom's line drawings and watercolors, rich with Celtic patterns, began to appear in books and prints from various small press publishers. These unabashedly Romantic works made a strong impact in the fantasy field—particularly when viewed among the imagery that was prevalent at the time (a plethora of muscular barbarians and women in chain mail bikinis). In the early eighties, Tom began his first commissions for New York publishers. He soon switched mediums from watercolor to oil paint on paper and board. Yet his training as a watercolorist was evident in the oil technique that has since become his trademark: layering the paints in extremely thin washes and glazes, delicately applied.

When Tom began designing book covers, there were (and are still) two distinct branches of fantasy illustration. The first, which dominated the field, was a robust Heroic school of painting. Exemplified by Michael Whelan or Don Maitz, it could be traced back through Frank Frazetta to the early American illustration masters: N.C. Wyeth, Maxfield Parrish, Howard Pyle, and the Brandywine school. The second branch, exemplified by English artists like Yvonne Gilbert or Alan Lee, was more European in its roots, tracing back to the "Golden Age" illustrators (Rackham, Nielson, Dulac, et al), the Pre-Raphaelites, Beardsley, and Klimt. "New Romantic" art, as it was called then, could be found in prints, in children's books, and even in the comic book field, but was only rarely found on fantasy novels (most notably in the art of Jeffrey Jones, a peerless painter who managed to work in both the Heroic and Romantic modes at once).

Tom's work, along with Robert Gould's, was instrumental in changing the bias against Romantic art for paperback books—which in turn assisted the commercial viability of a more Romantic brand of fantasy fiction. His understated, iconographic paintings perfectly suited the new post-





Tolkien fiction. Years later, Tom's art has become so familiar to lovers of the fantastic that it is difficult to remember how radical it seemed to publishers back then. Unlike many cover artists, he eschewed the literal depiction of scenes in favor of creating a mood, an icon, a figurative symbol that would capture the flavor of the text. "Books should be like magical jeweled boxes," he said. "It's the writer's job to tell the story. My job is to make you want to pick up the box and to peer inside."

By the mid-eighties, he'd begun to split his time between Boston and a loft in lower Manhattan. Despite the bucolic imagery he was creating, he was very much an urban man, fond of roaming the city streets for inspiration. He had a penchant for old diners and cafes tucked into the back streets of Soho and Tribeca; many of his best ideas began as sketches on the back of a napkin. He created two children's book series (*Goblin Tales* and *Nightlights*); wrote the children's book *A Monster at Christmas*; worked as the art director for Donald Grant, Publisher; developed ideas for book packagers; and began the work for which he is still best known *outside* the genre today: modernistic, cutting-edge book designs which manipulate reproductive and computer techniques to unique effect. These stunning, award-winning designs (which are very different from his fantasy art) can be found on mainstream and mystery books from a number of New York publishing houses.

Today, Tom speaks of this New York

Tom Canty's art is firmly rooted in mythic and Romantic traditions. His book covers make us eager to read the tales inside. PREVIOUS SPREAD: His haunting cover art for Snow White, Blood Red. TOP LEFT: *The sixth annual* Year's Best Fantasy and Horror *cover. ABOVE: Cover art for the* Eternal Champion Vol. 1 *by Michael Moorcock.*





period as the time when the foundations were laid for the work that has since followed. The *Adult Fairy Tales* series of novels came out of those years, inspired by our mutual love for the older, unexpurgated folk stories. The *Snow White, Blood Red* anthology series, co-edited with Ellen Datlow, was inspired by the darker side of fairy tales and the fiction of Angela Carter. Fans of Tom's art don't always realize that his involvement in such book projects encompasses much more than simply creating the lovely cover designs. Tom and I (along with a loose circle of other writers, artists, and editors) "grew up" together in the fantasy field over the years when the category came into being. As a result, he has been a behind-the-scenes collaborator and trusted sounding board for much of my work. And such is his generosity of spirit and willingness to share his hard-won skills that there are many others in the East Coast publishing world who could say the same.

Currently, Tom lives and works in a house in the woods outside of Boston; he also co-



owns a fifteenth century cottage in southwest England. Rather than resting on the laurels he's earned through years of hard work in the fantasy genre, he has begun to move into other areas of the book arts, exploring new directions. Of his new projects, the ones that I know best are the ones we've recently worked on together: *Rose and Thorn* is an art book collecting fifteen years of paintings, sketches, notes, designs and ephemera—a dialogue, in words and paint, on the subjects of fantasy, fairy tales, myth, and modern Romanticism (available this fall from Mark V. Zeising, Publisher). A second collaboration, *The Wild Swans*, is a children's picture book, recasting a lovely old fairy tale as a nineteenth century story, rich with the Pre-Raphaelite imagery that Thomas paints so well.

This, then, is the professional Thomas Canty, seen through the hundreds of book covers and designs he has created, resulting in two World Fantasy Awards, museum showings, and other honors. The personal side of the man is a little harder for me to pin down in words—for Tom can be like the Trickster figures found in old mythology: elusive, contradictory, presenting many different faces to the world. With one foot planted in the nineteenth century, one foot firmly in the twentieth, he is as conversant with the ideas of William Morris and Oscar Wilde as he is fond of bad American television. He can be a shy and reclusive man, yet he is also, conversely, outgoing and charismatic, with a network of friends all across the country. He is smart, insightful, generous to a fault, and the funniest of story-tellers. As an artist he is a perfectionist and does not rate his own work as highly as do his peers—but the fact remains that his work has had a lasting impact on the fantasy field.

It will be exciting to see the art that emerges from his studio in the years to come, as he continues to explore, expand, and refine his approach to the marriage of text and imagery. I have no doubt that his future work will be gorgeous and innovative, while retaining that "Canty look," that grace...the mark of a true Romantic. ❧

Tom creates a mood, a figurative symbol to capture the flavor of a text. In this untitled painting (LEFT) the languorous, sensual transformation of a woman unfolds and we want to know her whole story. ABOVE: The cover to the seventh annual Year's Best Fantasy and Horror *promises a magical voyage to exotic times and lands.*

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

BY BRIAN STABLEFORD

Illustration by Jon Foster

Repentance, they say, is good for the soul. But what of the souls—and the bodies—of those around you?

THE CRIMSON SANDS OF the Cinnabar Desert had always had a mysterious attraction for eremites and cenobites alike. While the cenobites labored long and hard to ring its deep-set wells with stern edifices of stone and sun-baked brick, the eremites found homes among the caves that pitted the vermilion cliffs, which had been weathered for thousands of years by the simoom which blew from the west.

These holy men served half a hundred different gods and competed fiercely with one another, on behalf of their solemn masters, to set the most perfect examples of chastity, austerity, humility, and self-mortification. There was not a man among them who did not dress himself in a bug-infested hair shirt by day and lie down upon the cold bare rock by night. None ever slept for longer than an hour, and all but the feeblest in body and soul scourged themselves thrice daily with nettles, thorns, or supple rods, according to their taste. The hardiest of them were ever eager to inflict themselves with purulent ulcers and festering sores, for their gods were of the uncompromising kind which had put their followers on earth to win purity of spirit by tormenting the flesh; the few old men among them went naked but for their loincloths, in order to show their younger brethren what a beautiful mass of livid scar tissue a human body might become, with the proper encouragement.

Although they had sought refuge in the Cinnabar Desert in order to be as far away as it was possible to be from those sinks of iniquity which men called cities, the eremites and cenobites were by no means free from temptation, for like a magnet, the region drew imps and succubi and all manner of other petty demons, whose delight was to taunt these happy and innocent folk with terrible nightmares. By day the Cinnabar Desert was the most desolate place imaginable, but by night it became a battlefield where the forces of Light and Dark fought bitter skirmishes in memory of that long-ago battle which was supposed to have settled such questions forever. But the cenobites and eremites quickly became so hardy that no temptation could shake their resolve.

There was no better place in all the world for the souls of men to be purified. There never was a sinner so great that he could not be turned into a man of indomitable virtue by the fierce heat of the desert sun.

There were many among the eremites and cenobites who became legends in their own lifetime on account of the extremity of their virtue, but such lifetimes were often, understandably, cut short; the better gods are ever avid to claim their most loyal and self-effacing followers. But there was one particular eremite whose reputation extended not over mere years but over decades, in spite of the fact that he had never shirked his most injurious responsibilities. The eremites who knew him—some of whom saw him as often as once a month, in spite of their devotion to solitude—proclaimed without hesitation that they had never known a man who lived in such a narrow and uncomfortable cave, or who kept it so filthy. Never, they opined, had there ever been one of their kind who contrived to be so lean for so long, or who had succeeded in maintaining about his person gangrenous lesions which would have killed a lesser man in a matter of days. No one who saw this man could possibly doubt that he suffered intensely and interminably, and everyone marveled at the fact that he was never silent; prayers of a most devout kind poured from his withered lips without pause or cease.

The name by which this holiest of holy men was known was Nanayakara, though everyone knew that this was not the name he had been given at birth. Many of those who came to the Cinnabar Desert in search of spiritual health had formerly worn other names and had followed careers which they now wanted to forget entirely. Rumor had it that Nanayakara had once been a very bad man, but the holy men who lived in the desert were all agreed that the evil that men do should not be held to their account eternally. They believed that men should be permitted to repent and expiate their sins in suffering, and that they might then become truly virtuous. Even the vilest of men, they believed, might be won to the path of light by a god who was sufficiently generous to encourage him to redemption.

The god whom Nanayakara served was the most mysterious of the members of the Great Pantheon of Light, but by no means the least significant. His true name was very rarely revealed, even to his most devout and devoted followers, because it was a name of awesome power whose pronouncement could turn the whole world upside down. His followers were only permitted to refer to him—apologetically—by means of a brief vowel sound like that contained in the middle of the word "but."



Nanayakara's sojourn in the Cinnabar Desert lasted three-and-forty years, and he took a certain very modest pleasure in the fact that it had taken him only a year to forget his former life in its entirety, so that he would not be distracted from his sacred mission of self-abasement by wayward memories. In time, Nanayakara outlived everyone who had been numbered among his neighbors when he first arrived to claim his miserable cave, and there was no one save for himself who knew how long he had dwelt there. But *he* knew, for he kept count of every single prayer which spilled from his mouth, and the rhythm of those incessant prayers measured the passing of time with consummate accuracy. He knew *exactly* how long he had spent in the ragged fissure in the red rock, and every time the number of his prayers reached a particularly significant figure—ten thousand million, for instance, or seven times seven times seven times seven times seven times seven—he wondered whether the moment of his release might have come.

BECAUSE NOTHING IN THE WORLD IS ETERNAL, NANAYAKARA'S release eventually did come—but it came in a most unexpected way. Nanayakara had long been convinced that his joyous ordeal would end triumphantly in death and transportation, amid clouds of glory, to whatever ultimate reward was reserved for the most faithful servants of his unnameable god, but he was wrong. As things turned out, he awoke one morning to find his surroundings exactly as they had always been—but that he himself had changed. The wounds afflicting his flesh had healed to the extent that they were capable of healing; the prayers which had flooded from his lips for so many years had ceased in their flow; and he had recovered the memories which he had earlier taken such great care to lose.

Had Nanayakara been able to burst into tears, he would have done so instantly, for the knowledge of what he once had been was very unwelcome to him, but he could not.

O great but unnameable god, he moaned in the awful silence created by the absence of his prayers, *why have you allowed this to happen to me?*

The unnameable god was one of those who never addressed his followers directly, but he was usually generous in allowing them to leap intuitively to correct conclusions. Nanayakara, uncomfortably aware of the fact that his name was no longer Nanayakara, quickly realized that his memories must have been reawakened for a purpose, and he soon saw what that purpose must be.

He also realized that something else had been put into his mind. He realized that *he knew the true name of the unnameable god!* The power to turn the world upside down was his.

His first thought on being confronted with this miraculous intuition, was that he was utterly unworthy; but it did not take him long to conclude that his unworthiness was beside the point. Clearly, he had been given this information for a particular purpose, and it was his duty to carry out that purpose. With that name in his possession, he had become a great magician, and it was obvious that the unnameable god did not intend him to be an eremite any longer.

The man who had been Nanayakara for three-and-forty years immediately left his cave and walked down the face of the rugged cliff to an assembly of stony hovels, where the cenobites serving the god Mutisaya gathered together to celebrate the most demanding and esoteric rites of their faith. When they saw him coming, they rushed from their dens, crying: "A miracle! A miracle! Nanayakara the Gangrenous is made whole again!"

But the former Nanayakara cried out to them and warned them to keep their distance lest they should be polluted by him.

"Alas, alas," he wailed, "I am Nanayakara no longer. I know now that the name which was given me at birth was Rumulshah, and that I was a king in my own land. I know, too, that I was a very wicked king—a lover of luxury and vice, and a tyrannical oppressor. For three-and-forty years I have been allowed to do penance for my hideous sins, thanks to the mercy of the unnameable god, but so extremely vile were my transgressions that my redemption is not yet complete. I must now seek out the kingdom which I once ruled when I was the hapless and hideous instrument of the dark god Xanatos, and make what reparation I can for what I did, as the instrument of a better, kinder, and infinitely more generous deity."

The followers of Mutisaya were suitably impressed by this revelation, and they instantly began to pick up stones and hurl them as hard as they could at the former holy man, in order to help him on his way. That night, each and every one of them took care to thank Mutisaya for his mercy in allowing them to find their own deliverance so easily, but there was not one among them who did not give himself a few extra strokes of the lash, lest he had fallen into the habit of treating himself too leniently, for no one wanted to be sent back to the world in order to make reparation for his error.

NOW THAT HE WAS RUMULSHAH again and no longer Nanayakara, the ex-eremite set his face toward the southeast and began the long march which would take him out of the Cinnabar Desert and into populated regions. Ultimately, he knew, he would have to go into the Sweltering Lands, where the Infinite Forest and the plains which interrupted its infinity were host to countless petty kingdoms, including the one which had been his to rule and to ravage. He did not know exactly where it lay, but he knew the general direction, and he remembered that his journey to the Cinnabar Desert had taken three full years.

As he walked, he tried again and again to pray, but he found that his lips—which had done nothing else for three-and-forty years—had somehow lost the knack of it. Rumulshah guessed that he would not be able to pray again until he had made himself truly worthy to utter prayers; not until he had added substantial reparation to his long apology could his heinous sins be properly forgiven. He did not bemoan this sad fate but put on a brave face.

I have learned to be patient, as well as to be virtuous, he told himself. *The unnameable god has prepared me for this task, and I will not fail him.*

As the sun set behind him on the third day of his journey, Rumulshah came at last to the edge of the Cinnabar Desert and passed into a region in which thorny bushes grew, though hardly in abundance.

Nomads roamed this region with their sparse herds of goats and camels. He quickly fell in with one such party, whose women took pity on him because he was so old and so nearly naked and covered in fearful scars. They fed him milk and cheese and sour unleavened bread and gave him a cloak to wear, all out of charity. Rumulshah thanked them very kindly and asked them if they had ever heard the name of the city-kingdom of Munimazana, which had once been his, but they had not.

"I have heard," he said carefully, "that it once had a very evil king named Rumulshah, who became notorious."

"Alas," said the oldest of the women who had taken pity on him, "we know nothing at all about cities or their kings; we're the wildest of folk, whose way of life is wandering. We have nothing to do with wheat or gold or writing, and those who deal in such things, whether they be kings or merchants, have nothing to do with us."

"Perhaps you are better off," muttered Rumulshah. "No doubt your humility saves you from much ill fortune and preserves virtue among your people."

"Perhaps so," admitted the old woman, with a sigh. "But it's not easy to be virtuous, even when you have nothing. I'm glad we could help you, but it's not often that folk of our kind find people worse off than ourselves and thus discover opportunities for charity."

Her kindness would have caused Rumulshah to weep with shame had he been capable of tears, but he was not.

"Alas," he said, in a whisper, "I am not worthy of your charity. I was once a very great villain—but I hope that the cloak which you have given me might help to keep me alive until I have made some reparation for my terrible sins."

"I was young myself once," she told him. "I know how delicious sins can be when the flesh is avid and the conscience calm. Now I'm old like you and probably just as full of regrets. My advice to you,

old man, is to make peace with yourself and forget about worthiness and reparation."

"I can never do that," he told her. "I am not that kind of man."

BEYOND THE THORNSCRUB RUMULSHAH FOUND MORE FERTILE lands, where there were vineyards bearing purple fruit in great profusion, and villages huddled about the huge stone vats where the grapes were fermented to make wine.

There were roads in this region, for where there is wine, there are merchants who come to carry it away to distant cities in stone jugs and glass bottles, bringing grain in exchange, and cloth, and pots and iron tools. Rumulshah set his feet upon these roads, but he slept beneath the stars because he had no coin to pay for lodging at the inns, and he had nothing to eat but the sour berries which grew wild outside the fences that guarded the vineyards.

It chanced that in one of the villages through which he passed, the wine was just ready for drinking, and its inhabitants were making merry. Rumulshah was taken in by a company of amiable drunkards, who gave him good bread and wine. One of them, seeing that he was so frail, took him to his house afterward and let him use a bed of straw.

In the morning, this young man gave Rumulshah a staff which had belonged to his father, now deceased. Rumulshah thanked the young man very kindly and asked him whether he had ever heard of the city-kingdom of Munimazana, in the Sweltering Lands, or the reputation of its atrocious king, Rumulshah.

"We're not traveling folk," the young man told him. "We're sons of the vine, rooted in the soil. You must ask the merchants for news of cities and kingdoms—it's their business to know the names of distant places, and the prices in their marketplaces. We only know the price of wine. But I suspect that you have a long journey ahead of you, and I can only hope that you have time enough for its completion. I'll give you a jug to take with you, but you must sip it slowly, else it'll make you dizzy in the noonday heat."

"I do not deserve such kindness," Rumulshah told him, sadly, remembering that Munimazana had vineyards of its own, whose produce he had once quaffed in mind-befuddling quantities. "I was once a very bad man, and I only accept your gifts in the hope that they may help me to make reparation for the evil I did."

"I'm not a good man myself," the young man told him, unregretfully. "I was never as dutiful as I should have been, and my father died a disappointed man. In giving you his staff to help support you, I am making reparation for the fact that I failed in supporting him."

"The reparation which I have to make," Rumulshah told him, "is greater by far than that."

THE ROADS WHICH LED SOUTHEASTWARD FROM THE VINEYARDS TOOK Rumulshah into more prosperous regions, where some farmers planted their fields with grain and some grew dazoes, while others had orchards or grazed sleek cattle. There were many merchants on the roads hereabouts, and many robbers too, but neither the merchants nor the robbers paid much heed to Rumulshah, and the farmers did not deign to notice him at all.

Every now and again he would ask people he met whether they had heard of Munimazana, or the name of its terrible king, but no one had. He was beginning to feel slightly offended by the fact that the great evil which he had done was not better-known in the world. By his own reckoning, he had fully deserved to be reviled far and wide, and he had hoped to find his name a byword for all that was vile in human inclination. But he consoled himself with the thought that he was still two years distant from his destination, and that the world had a more than adequate supply of evil kings to revile. Poor folk such as those who would condescend to pass the time of day with him were understandably philosophical about such matters.

It was far easier to find food in this region, though it was sometimes difficult to decide which fruits might be legally picked and which might not. Sometimes laborers who sweated in the fields for a meager wage would share a little of their bread with the traveler, and sometimes men of that kind would fall into step with him as he went on his way, having tired of one employer and determined to search for a better one.

"I've always kept on the move," one such sun-bronzed fellow explained to him. "If you stay too long in one place, you find yourself anchored down by wife and whelps, and you lose the knack of sleeping in barns and under hedges. A laborer can easily become a bondsman, obliged to his master for the roof over his head and the bread on his plate. Freedom's priceless, don't you think?"

"I am not free," Rumulshah told him, sorrowfully. "Nor can I ever be free, until I have made reparation for the evil I have done."

"What evil was that?" asked the other, curiously.

"I have been the cause of great suffering," Rumulshah said, reluctantly. "There is not a sin you can name that I have not committed. I have raped, I have tortured, I have murdered, I have cruelly oppressed an entire nation."

"I dare say that every man gets away with whatever he can," answered the other, looking at Rumulshah very strangely. "I'm of the kind which never could, and I would have judged you to be of the same kind. Mind you, I've managed a rape or two in my time, and enjoyed them to the full. You're harmless now, I hope—or are you perhaps a mighty wizard in disguise, able to raise the spirits of the dead and turn men into toads if they look at you askance?"

"I was once a master of necromancers and sorcerers," said Rumulshah, in a low and mournful tone. "Their guilt is my guilt." He did not confess that he was indeed a great magician, armed with the secret name of the unnameable god. He knew that he had to hoard that name and its magical power most jealously, so that he might use it for its proper purpose.

"Did it ever occur to you," the laborer asked, pensively, "that you might be mad?"

"I am the sanest man in the world," Rumulshah assured him. "I am the only one who truly understands the meaning of sanity."

IN THE MARKETPLACE OF A CITY CALLED MOTshubi, Rumulshah finally met someone, a dealer in amulets and petty magic, who had heard of Munimazana. "It's said that its citizens breed salamanders for their venom," the merchant said, "and that no better venom is to be found in all the Sweltering Lands. Also, rumor has it that their snakedancers are particularly beguiling—but that's probably just talk. Wherever you go, people will tell you about distant lands where the magicians are much more powerful and the whores much more attractive."

"Did you ever hear tales of a king, more wicked than any before or after him, who ruled in Munimazana?" asked Rumulshah, quietly but expectantly.

"Can't say," replied the merchant, dismissively. "I only listen to *interesting* gossip. If you believe their subjects, kings nowadays are infinitely more wicked than their forefathers. It's the nature of lesser men to complain about their betters. It'll all be the same in a hundred years time."

"That it will," agreed Rumulshah mournfully, "unless someone, somewhere can begin to make reparation."

The merchant looked at him oddly and hurried away to be about his business.

In cities like Motshubi, it was not so easy to find food. There was always plenty of garbage in the streets, but there was also a legion of scavengers ever eager to derive what sustenance they could from its meager bounty.

In these city streets Rumulshah met thieves so desperate that they might readily have killed a man for a plain staff and a worn cloak such as those he carried with him, but on the few occasions when someone came close, intending to molest him, he fixed them with his stern eyes—and they invariably saw something there within which made them fall back and save their avaricious malevolence for another occasion. He was glad of this, for it saved him from having to use his magic to protect himself.

It was the same with constables and men-at-arms who sometimes came across him when they were searching for someone to arrest on suspicion of a crime. Whenever such men came close enough to see the tormented expression in his eyes, they fell back in embarrassment and turned aside in favor of some less disconcerting victim.

Rumulshah never used his magic to provide himself with food. He knew that it was intended for a much higher purpose and must not be frittered away. He was well-used to deprivation, and his needs were scant. He never begged, although he might easily have folded up his cloak and sat near-naked upon it, thus to present an appearance far more wretched than the majority of those who made a decent living as urban mendicants. He was not ashamed to pick up scraps from the gutter or accept charity when it was freely and generously offered, but he did not think himself worthy to ask others for alms until he had made reparation for his sins.

HE PASSED FROM THE MORE PROSperous lands into hotter regions where the landlords used dark-skinned slaves, raided from the depths of the Infinite Forest, to raise cotton and sugar cane. Here, again, he found food growing wild in abundance—but beyond the cultivated lands, there was a further wilderness which was all briny swamps and sullen, creeper-decked trees. The swamps were swarming with crocodiles and biting insects, and there were bandits too; but his limbs were thin and his blood was watery and his pouch was always empty, and so the various predators passed him by.

Whenever he came to a part of the swamp which was impassable, he found fishermen willing to take him across, and they would often let him share their meals.

"Men who love city streets hate the swamplands," a philosophically inclined medicine man told him, "though the odor of stagnation is pleasant enough by comparison with their sewers. The merchants who carry goods through here curse the necessity of using barges, and they hate our blood-sucking flies, but they have no idea how bountiful the swamp really is, and how easily a man may live on fish and shrimps. *You* are clearly a more understanding man, for you take no notice of the flies at all."

But the fisherfolk had never heard of Munimazana, and the name Rumulshah meant nothing at all to them.

"It must be one of the kingdoms in the great grassy plain," the medicine man explained. "We trade with the forest people, and sometimes with the slave-merchants, but the plain is very dry and we abhor dryness. We hear rumors occasionally of its disasters and its wars, but no one here bothers to remember the names of distant kings who are no better and no worse than our own."

"Rumulshah was uncommonly bad," said Rumulshah, tiredly. Repetition had begun to make the assertion seem ineffably tedious.

"They all are," said the medicine man. "Better to avoid them by making a home where kings will let you alone. A man like you or me, too old for hard work or making love, should make a home where it is possible to rest and forget about the interminably anxious affairs of the greater world."

"Munimazana is my home," said Rumulshah. "There can be no rest for me until I have made recompense for my sins."

"A man who thinks like that can waste his entire life in regrets," the medicine man pointed out.

"While I have traveled the world these last two years," Rumulshah countered, "I have seen wasted lives by the score and the evidence of a million unrepaired sins. But I learned virtue in the Cinnabar Desert, where the simoom scoured my soul, and I must do what I can to make amends for my former villainy."

THE FORESTED LANDS BEYOND THE SWAMPS WERE THE MOST BEAUtiful through which he had passed, but they were also the most dangerous, for their various tribes were embroiled in a terrible war. Rumulshah marched for some twenty days in the wake of a ravaging army whose soldiers he never saw, constantly coming across villages which they had burned and people they had killed or maimed.

Once he found a young girl who had been raped a dozen times, then stabbed in the belly and left for dead. He could not do much to make her comfortable, but he built a fire to keep her warm when night fell, and sat up with her, singing softly to her.

She asked him if his songs were magical, and whether they would soothe her pain, and he wanted to lie to her in case the belief might spare her a measure of suffering, but he could not do it. Three-and-forty years in the Cinnabar Desert had purged his soul of all propensity for lying. He longed to speak the secret name of the unnameable god, and use its magic to heal her, but he knew that it would be wrong. That name had to be saved for a higher purpose.

"Were you also made homeless by the war?" she asked him.

"No," he told her. "I was made homeless by wickedness. Once, I too made war and sent forth my armies to kill and be killed. In the meantime, I kept myself safe and indulged my every appetite, thinking that the dark god Xanatos would keep me safe. But the dark gods are betrayers all, and Xanatos abandoned me. I was fortunate to be committed by chance to the care of that god whose true name is never spoken, who is known only by the vowel sound which marks the heart of the word *but*. With his help I repented of my sins and became an exile and a holy man. Now I must return to Munimazana to undo a little of the harm I did."

The girl, like almost everyone else he had encountered in his travels, had never heard of Munimazana. "I have not been very wicked at all," she told him. "But I suppose I must have been more wicked than I thought, or the god which was supposed to look after me would not have given me to the soldiers."

"It is because the innocent suffer as you have," he said, "that the guilty must go to such extremes, if they hope to redeem themselves from the burden of their sins."

She did not know what he meant.

"The evil that men do," he said, wanting to explain it to her so that she would understand, "leaves terrible scars upon the world, and yet the men who do evil are ever ready to excuse and forgive themselves. True repentance is difficult to achieve, but even when a man has truly repented of his sins, the scars are still there. Evil should not simply be forgotten; it should be undone. The world is a sick place, and it needs turning upside down. Even though my name has been forgotten by everyone outside the kingdom which I once ruled, I know what horror that name should evoke in all who hear it. *I know*, and I must make amends."

Despite all his best efforts, however, she still could not follow the intricacies of his argument.

She died before dawn, and he had to leave her where she lay.

WHEN HE CAME TO THE EDGE OF THE GREAT PLAIN WHICH SAT LIKE a vast green sea in the heart of the Infinite Forest, Rumulshah found men who knew precisely where Munimazana was and could set him on the right road. "But it is not a good place to go," one man advised him. "Its fields are rich and the hunting is excellent, but the nobles of the land have long grown over-accustomed to luxury and are notoriously capricious. The city has a bad reputation nowadays, and its king is said to be an uncommonly evil man."

"It has had kings before who were more evil still," said Rumulshah, dolefully. "Surely they still remember the villainies of Rumulshah and shudder at the memory?"

"I doubt it," said the man. "I never heard that name spoken there. They are too full of their present woes, and their hatred is all reserved for King Guronihar."

The name Guronihar meant nothing to Rumulshah, but that did not surprise him. He had had a dozen wives and half a hundred concubines when he was tyrant in Munimazana, and he had never bothered to count his children, let alone memorize their names. This Guronihar might easily be the fruit of his own loins or one of his myriad grandsons. He could not suppress a pang of vexation at the

thought that his own villainies had been so easily eclipsed, but took satisfaction in the knowledge that whether or not men had contrived to forget the evil that was done by Rumulshah, due reparation must still be made.

"Do they still worship Xanatos in Munimazana?" he asked his informant.

"The nobles do," he was told. "But the common people have some petty god whose name they never speak."

That petty god is not so petty, after all, thought Rumulshah. *He has forged an instrument which will right the wrongs that his people have suffered so long.*

As Rumulshah proceeded on his way along the dusty roads of the great plain, he encountered many merchants who had traded in Munimazana at one time or another.

"There's a healthy market in exotic animal skins," one told him, "but you have to be careful when buying salamander venom. A few drops of the local brew is easily enough to kill a horse, but there's absolutely no way to disguise the stuff; it turns food putrid in seconds and makes wine stink like rotten eggs. I've sold a few doses in my time, but I've never yet had a satisfied customer."

"There's money to be made there," another said, "if you're clever enough. There are so many semi-skilled sorcerers working for the noble families that you can get a fortune for all kinds of rubbish, especially if you can pass the goods off as dwarfs' work or invent some elfin connection—all that twee stuff sounds wonderfully exotic to people of their kind. If only I could get my hands on a jawful of dragons' teeth next time I'm up north, I could make a real killing. Can't think what they see in that snakedancing, though—why should a man pay extra for a whore just because she's kissing cousin to a cobra?"

"I'm never going back," said a third. "The bribes you have to put about just to be able to set up shop! It might be different if they got a new king, but Guronihar simply doesn't understand the rules of the game. What's a king for but to keep the roads safe and to make sure the coinage isn't debased? I don't deny that he does his fair share of mutilating thieves and vagabonds, but last year he had an honest trader castrated for giving short measure. We should all steer clear of the place until he's safely out of the way—though I dare say his successor won't be much better."

As he approached still closer to his destination, Rumulshah finally contrived to discover an old woman who remembered his name. "Aye," said the ancient, ruminatively, in answer to his question. "There *was* a king in Munimazana who had that name. His army won a battle against the hordes of Arthanyx of Quirillian; I remember that."

"Was he not an exceptionally evil man?" asked Rumulshah, desperately. "Is his memory not hateful to his people, even after all these years?"

"Probably," said the crone. "I've enough to do keeping track of who's related to whom, and who beat whom in which battles. If I tried to remember the crimes people committed, I'd be full up in no time. Are you bound for Munimazana?"

"I am," said Rumulshah.

"Got children there?"

"I have," Rumulshah replied, with a sigh.

"Mine don't care much about me neither," she said, mistaking the reason for his sigh. "You spend your life teaching them everything you know, and they call you an old nag and wish you dead. You know better than to expect a decent welcome, I suppose."

"I am not worthy of any welcome," said Rumulshah, miserably. "I have much to set right before I can be forgiven by those I have injured in the past."

"Don't do your children any favors," said the crone, persisting in her misunderstanding of the implication of his words. "They won't thank you for it. They never do."

AT LONG LAST THE DAY CAME WHEN RUMULSHAH PASSED THROUGH the gate of the city which he had once ruled with a rod of iron. He soon began to recognize the streets through which he passed and was glad to observe that the people going about their daily business seemed reasonably well-fed, reasonably well-dressed, and—in spite of their constant complaining—as happy as any people he had seen during these last three years.

They could not have been so cheerful when I was king, he thought, *for I was a very wicked king indeed. Time must have eased the memory of my terrible reign so that people nowadays regard this mild Guronihar as an authentic tyrant. But that cannot excuse the dreadful things which I did, and reparation must be made.*

WHEN HE EVENTUALLY CAME **to stand before the huge ornamented doors of the palace at the center of the** city, his heart was possessed by a fierce ache. He had quit that edifice without ceremony nine-and-forty years ago, driven by the awful consciousness of his evil nature. How merciful the unnameable god had been in permitting him to forget for so long his terrible past and in allowing him to find a better way of life among the virtuous eremites of the Cinnabar Desert! What patience the unnameable god had exhibited in transforming him into a worthy instrument of divine retribution!

Now, although he could not see exactly how he was supposed to go about the task, the time had come when he must put that marvelous training to use.

I am a magician without compare, he reminded himself—but now, for the first time, a hint of doubt crept into his silent reassurance. It occurred to him that he had been traveling for three years and had not worked a single spell. But he put such doubts aside immediately, for he had limitless faith in the god who remained nameless to everyone but him.

While he stood there looking at the awesome portal of his former abode, the ornamented doors were drawn back to make way for the gilded carriage of King Guronihar, drawn by six snow-white horses and flanked by a dozen mounted soldiers. It was not the same carriage that Rumulshah had used, and he stared at it curiously as it emerged from the doorway. He was so fascinated by the sight of it that he did not observe the behavior of the crowd which had surrounded him only moments before, and was not aware that it had melted away with astonishing alacrity.

Rumulshah was not in any way impeding the path of the carriage or its escort. The entire entourage could have sailed past him with ease while he stood and stared, and for a moment or two it seemed that it would do just that. But while he stood there, erect and solitary, with his pale eyes mesmerized by the sight of the gilded carriage, the horses were suddenly reined in. The mounted soldiers, after a moment's confusion, were likewise stopped in their tracks.

The curtain which hid the interior of the carriage was abruptly drawn aside, and two faces stared out. One was middle-aged, bearded and bloated, with eyes like a vulture's; the other was young, delicately veiled, and crowned with soft jet black hair.

Rumulshah ignored the girl and focused his pale eyes on the face of Guronihar, tyrant of Munimazana. Guronihar stared back, seemingly astonished and mysteriously perturbed.

"I have taught my subjects to be wary of insolence," said the king, lazily. "You must be a stranger here, to stand so boldly before my palace, with every nerve and sinew of your skinny frame giving evidence of treasonous intent."

"I am no stranger," said Rumulshah, softly. "But when I was last within these walls, there was a man named Rumulshah upon the throne, who was, I think, a far more cruel and evil king than you."

Guronihar's bloated face was suddenly contorted with fury. "That is my grandfather's name which you have dared to blacken," said the king. "He ruled as wisely and as well as he knew how, and thousands wept when he suddenly and unaccountably disappeared—the victim, no doubt, of some vile sorcery worked by the followers

of that nameless god beloved by all the riffraff of the city. Captain, seize that man and throw him in the deepest dungeon until I have time to pass proper judgment upon him."

When he heard this, Rumulshah smiled—and he saw that his smile annoyed Guronihar even more intensely than what he had earlier said to him. At a word from their captain, two of the soldiers quickly dismounted, seized his staff from him, and threw it away. Then they dragged him to the great doorway, where they passed him on to others of their kind. He was then ungently escorted across the great courtyard, down a series of winding staircases, and along numerous filthy corridors, for half a mile and more. At last he was taken into a tiny cell, where he was pinned to the wall by shackles placed about his ankles. He was left alone in the cold and dark.

He made no resistance or complaint about this treatment, because he felt in his bones the unshakable conviction that the hour of his deliverance, while not quite yet, was close at hand.

HOW LONG RUMULSHAH REMAINED IN THE DARK HE COULD NOT tell. He would have marked the time with prayer if he could, but his lips were no longer permitted to give voice to his piety. That was his only discomfort; he did not mind the darkness, or the cold, or the thirst and hunger which soon began to afflict him. Such deprivations had no power to injure *him*, who had been the holiest of all the eremites of the Cinnabar Desert.

He had not the slightest doubt that Guronihar intended to have him tortured and killed, but he laughed softly to himself while he wondered what torture Guronihar could possibly inflict upon him that would be one-tenth as harsh as those which he had lavished on himself for three-and-forty years.

Eventually they came for him. His jailers stripped him of his cloak and loincloth and threw them away, then sent him to stand with a dozen other persons similarly unclad. Under the watchful supervision of a sergeant-at-arms, the entire company was doused down with buckets of icy water and scrubbed with brushes whose bristles were laden with caustic soap.

Afterward, the shivering victims were given clean loincloths. It was the first change of underwear Rumulshah had had in nine-and-forty years. He accepted it gratefully, although he knew that his captors' sole purpose in giving it to him was to ensure that he did not offend the nostrils of the king and the nobles of the court when he was brought before them for judgment.

THERE WAS A LONG QUEUE OF PEOPLE awaiting judgment in the great courtyard; Rumulshah's group was merely the latest batch in a long series. The queue included men and women of all ages—the youngest was barely seven years old. They were arranged as neatly as the sergeant could contrive, behind a wall of stout spearmen.

The Court of Judgment had changed little since Rumulshah had sat upon the stone throne; many of the colored tapestries that had bedecked the king's pavilion had been replaced, and the carpet in the nobles' section was now a deeper shade of blue, but out in the open, the terraces where the common people stood were exactly as they had always been, and so was the headsman's dais. The garotte, the rack, and the brazier gave every indication of being the same instruments that Rumulshah's own torturers and executioners had used.

There were so many felons to be tried that the court did not linger long over matters of ceremony. When each unfortunate was brought forward, a seneschal would read out the offense with which he was charged, an advocate would promptly give the verdict (guilty, in every case), and King Guronihar would immediately pronounce sentence.

Rumulshah observed that the great majority of the crimes were trivial and the great majority of the sentences were fines. Usually, someone would hurry forward from the crowd to pay the fine in question; if they did not, the prisoner was taken away again. Rumulshah was unimpressed by this demonstration of consistent clemency; he knew that the most serious cases would be saved until the end, so that the occasion might be suitably crowned with a generous measure of state terrorism.

It was not until the man three places in front of Rumulshah in the queue was taken forward that the expectant muttering of the crowd signaled a change of pace. Three ordinary murderers had already been given heavy fines, but the charge against this man was that he had struck a nobleman, and he was condemned to be garotted.

As soon as the sentence had been carried out, the next prisoner—a woman—was brought out. She was charged with negligently allowing a nobleman's baby to die of a fever, while she had been wet-nursing it. The crime was trivial enough, the baby having been a girl, but Guronihar favored the assembled multitude with a brief speech, explaining that an example had to be made.

The woman was set upon the rack, but she broke very easily and did not delay the proceedings for too long.

The prisoner immediately in front of Rumulshah was a boy of eleven, who was charged with a very impressive list of thefts, which included several exotic and valuable objects. Because the law of Munimazana specified that each charge had to be separately dealt with, it took rather a long time for the ironmaster to put in place the appropriate number of brands; but the job was done at last, and Rumulshah knew that his hour of glory had come.

He was led out into the open space before the king's pavilion. The seneschal read out the charge against him, which was treason. The advocate pronounced him guilty. The king leaned forward, ready to make another speech while the crowd waited, with bated breath, to hear exactly how the traitor was to be done to death.

But Guronihar was not allowed to begin his speech. It was Rumulshah who spoke instead.

"Do you not know me, Guronihar?" he said. And although he had not spoken very loudly, his words fell into an uncanny silence and were heard in every corner of the great courtyard.

Guronihar frowned, but he did not seem entirely displeased. He evidently had a certain appetite for debate and discourse, and there was no one else to be executed today.

"I know you," said the king, confidently. "I know every traitor in my kingdom, and it is my pleasure to play with them as a cat plays with mice. No villainy escapes the eyes and ears of my multitudinous agents. I know you, traitor—just as I know the others of your kind who think themselves safe while they watch your ignominious end."

As he spoke, Guronihar glanced sideways at the beautiful woman who sat beside him—who was not the same one that had been in the carriage with him at the time of Rumulshah's arrest. She smiled at him admiringly.

"What, then, is my name?" demanded Rumulshah.

"Names," said the king, negligently, "are unimportant."

"That is a lie," said Rumulshah, evenly. "For he who knows the name of the unnameable god has only to speak it and the world itself may be turned upside down so that evil may be undone and virtue put in its place."

These words brought forth a murmurous, and yet somehow tumultuous, reaction from the crowd on the terraces. Guronihar frowned again, much more deeply than before, but he was angry, not in any way alarmed. Rumulshah could see that the king was perfectly confident that the implied threat was empty.

"The world is the right way up as it is," said the king. "We have the guarantee of Xanatos—whose name everyone knows—that it will always remain so. If you think that you can overturn it, by all means try."

Then, for the first time in nine-and-forty years, Rumulshah raised his voice. He turned to the crowd, and he cried out: "Is there anyone here who knows my name? Is there anyone here who remembers me?"

There was silence: deep, profound, pregnant silence.

"Apparently not," said Guronihar, with grim satisfaction, after a full minute had passed.

"I am Rumulshah," sad Rumulshah. "For three-and-forty years I

was Nanayakara, who lived in the meanest of all the eremites' caves in the Cinnabar Desert, but before that I was Rumulshah the Tyrant, Rumulshah the Vile, Rumulshah the King of Munimazana. Now I am Rumulshah again, but I am Rumulshah the Repentant, Rumulshah the Avenger, Rumulshah the Great. *Do you hear me, Munimazana? I AM RUMULSHAH RETURNED TO REIGN IN MUNIMAZANA!"*

This time the silence only lasted for three or four seconds. Then Guronihar laughed. Then everyone else laughed.

A gale of laughter swept through the courtyard like the simoom of the Cinnabar Desert: hot, sand-laden and scouring.

While they laughed, Rumulshah pronounced the secret name of the unnameable god.

And the world turned upside down.

THE REIGN OF RUMULSHAH THE GREAT LASTED BUT A FEW SHORT years, but it was not forgotten for centuries. Rumor of it spread far and wide across the great plain, and into the Infinite Forest. The story was whispered in the swamplands and the great cities of the northwest, and in the vineyards beyond them. Even the nomads whose goats fed upon the thornscrub heard of it. In time the news was carried back even to the Cinnabar Desert, where the cenobites spoke of it between themselves in hushed tones, before going forth to tell it to the eremites.

Under the second reign of Rumulshah, the gluttonous noblemen of Munimazana were immediately cast down and made wretched. The torturers' guild was instantly disbanded and all instruments of official torture were burned or melted down. All merchants were promptly expelled from the city and the marketplace was destroyed. The breeders of salamanders were unceremoniously poisoned by their own products, and the infamous snakedancers were precipitously thrown out of their gaudy houses of ill repute into the streets.

The army was disarmed but it was not disbanded; it became the people's army instead of the king's army, and under the inspiring command of Rumulshah the Repentant, its officers quickly learned to be very zealous in the cause of virtue. There were many deserters in those early days, but those who remained soon cultivated a healthy love of proper self-discipline and an appropriate taste for subjecting others to proper discipline.

Henceforth, Rumulshah decreed, the people—without exception—would live humble and sinless lives. They would repent of their former transgressions and excesses, and each and every one would discover the inexpressible joy of having a clean conscience.

At first the people were allowed to live in their houses, with all the furniture that they had had before, but Rumulshah soon perceived that this only maintained certain undesirable inequalities and encouraged the people to maintain certain slovenly and luxurious habits which inhibited their achievement of true humility and true virtue. So he commanded that the houses be gutted and made more like the caves which the eremites of the Cinnabar Desert had been content to inhabit, and his virtuous army saw that it was done.

RUMULSHAH THE AVENGER QUICKLY realized that the salvation of his people was not to be won simply by humbling their former masters. He came to understand that they would never see the light, as he had done, unless they were to undergo an educative process not unlike his own. So he decreed that they must take care to mortify their flesh, as he had so gladly done; cultivate ulcers and sores, as he had so happily done; and wear hair shirts infested with bugs, as he had once deliriously done.

When these decrees were issued, many of his people tried to flee the city, but he could not allow them to damn themselves in such a fashion, and he sent his zealous soldiers to bring them back and to make sure that his instructions were carried out to the letter.

For a while, Rumulshah thought that he had done enough to secure the spiritual health of the realm, but in fact, the people became astonishingly bitter and quarrelsome, and he was forced to issue further edicts in order to save them from themselves. The Court of Judgment was always busy, but it was no longer an instrument of tyranny and terrorism. The rack, the garotte and the branding-iron were things of the past, as were the punitive fines which were really a form of disguised taxation. All the sentences passed by Rumulshah the Repentant were designed to rehabilitate offenders, and his officers were only required to scourge those recalcitrants who could not scourge themselves with sufficient enthusiasm.

Often and anon some poor deluded soul would stand before the stone throne and declare that Rumulshah the Good was a thousand times more cruel and hateful than Rumulshah the Evil had ever been, but Rumulshah knew that such outbursts were the last and most desperate inspirations of the defeated dark god Xanatos. He forgave everyone who spoke such blasphemies, no matter how deeply they wounded him.

RUMULSHAH EXPECTED THAT WITHIN A YEAR OF HIS RETURN TO power, his people would be utterly happy, and he was grievously disappointed by the discovery that they were not. He increased his efforts on their behalf and became sterner still in the cause of virtue when he realized that his exertions were beginning to take their toll on his health; he was, after all, an uncommonly old man.

Even when it became clear that he had not long to live, Rumulshah the Great never relented in the efforts which he made on behalf of the virtue of his people. He never became tired of helping them to discover the benefits of a thoroughly purged soul. He did everything he could, fervently and uncompromisingly, to assist them in their piety. Nor was his crusade entirely without result and reward, for some few of his people—those who scourged themselves and starved themselves and cultivated ulcers and sores with the greatest assiduity—did indeed begin to praise him very loudly and proclaim him a great savior.

Alas, these faithful and enlightened ones were still in a tiny minority when death finally came to claim him.

While Rumulshah lay on his deathbed, he pressed his ministers to make sure that his great work would be continued, and they loyally assured him that it would. In time, they said, the cause of righteousness would surely triumph, even over the awful stubbornness and innate wickedness of the men and women of Munimazana.

"You must be patient with them," he told them, "for they labored far too long under the rule of very wicked kings, and the evil that such men do cannot be undone in a day, even though the world be turned upside down. Never tire of urging them on in the cause of humility and virtue; though the hand that bears the whip may tire, it still must do its work, as fervently as it can."

When his last moments arrived, Rumulshah wondered if he ought to pass on to some favored successor the secret name which had been entrusted to him, which he had used to turn the world upside down; but he found to his consternation that he was strangely unable to utter it. He was mildly surprised, because he had certainly rediscovered his ability to pray, but the inability was not without parallel, for he never had recovered the capacity to shed tears.

It does not matter, he told himself. *I have done everything I could to make certain that Munimazana cannot be returned to its former condition, and I am certain that a dark god like Xanatos has not the power to turn the world downside up again, after it has once been righted.*

He was comforted by this conviction, which was the foundation stone of his ardent hope that salvation was possible for *all* men, wherever in the world they lived. One day, he felt sure, missionaries would go forth from Munimazana to carry his example to the farthest corners of the world. He knew full well how hard a task it was to undo the evil of centuries, even in a single kingdom, but he also knew that *it could be done.*

Anyone else, he was convinced, could have done as well as he had—anyone, at least, who was armed as he had been, with the secret name of that mysterious god who was known to his ordinary followers by the abrupt and apologetic vowel sound which lies at the heart of the word "but." ❧

BY MARK SUMNER

Virtually British Terry Pratchett's Discworld *comes to... disc.*

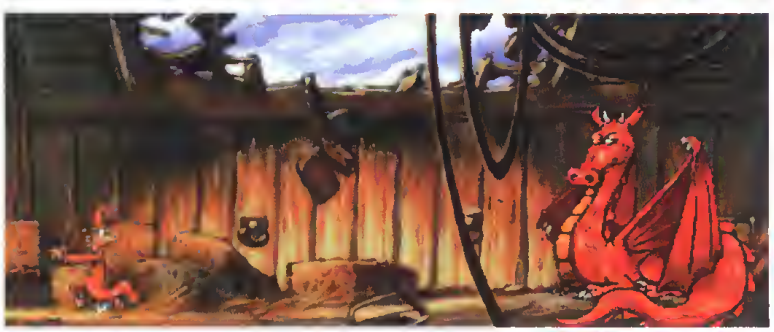
IT PROBABLY SAYS SOMETHING IMPORTANT ABOUT THE NATIONAL PSYCHE. IN THE UNITED States, we make bestsellers out of Stephen King and Dean Koontz. But on the other side of the pond, Terry Pratchett's quirky humor not only tops out the fantasy charts—he's one of the bestselling authors in the country. Whatever deep meaning there is to be found in this, it's probably not something we want to explore too closely.

If you are already a fan of Pratchett's work, or if you're one of that all too large group who have missed out, you can now visit his most popular creation, *Discworld*, in an interactive form. And with wonderful appropriateness, *Discworld* arrives in the form of a disc—a CD-ROM game from Psygnosis.

In the style of play, the game is a traditional side-view adventure. Anyone who is familiar with games like *King's Quest* should have no problem finding their way around. But the style of play says nothing about the real *style* of the game—the panache. This adventure has a style all its own. In this game, you control Pratchett's more-than-slightly daft wizard, Rincewind, as he scouts about a magic school and the surrounding countryside. Be forewarned, this guy is no Gandalf. He's a low-watt magician with less zip than a pair of trousers. The only thing really going for him is a smart mouth and a script full of zingers.

RIGHT: Discworld's *crazy wizard visits the home of the god*
BELOW: Rincewind's mission is to find the supposedly fictitious mythical dragon.





The look of the game is cartoonish, but that's not meant as an insult. While it's not likely to be mistaken for an upcoming Disney title, the quality here is high. The art work complements the tone of the game: appropriately twisted, with backgrounds that are quirky, and character animation that's gelastic, if sometimes a little sparse. There is enough expressiveness in the way the characters interact that you sometimes want to shove them around just to see their little cartoon eyes bug out. You'll also notice that the majority of scenes are composed of rooms that are far larger than a single screen, allowing Rincewind to wander over quite a large space. This helps eliminate the set-piece feel of many graphic adventures.

Here's a feature that will not send anyone running to the store, but should—the mouse interface on this game is particularly well designed. After slogging through other recent adventures, with their immense menus and dozens of "modes," the simplicity and directness of this interface is much appreciated. There's very little rooting around for obscure icons or searching out tiny, hidden "hot spots." A few left button and right button clicks are all you'll need to get around. When an object in the room is more than background, there are enough cues in the art that you don't have to search it out. Even the movement of the mouse is highlighted by little tinkerbell sparks, a nice relief from the usual pointers.

OK. Good pictures, great interface. But neither of these is the real strength of this adventure. The best part of *Discworld* lies in the story, and in the voices that tell the story.

There are hundreds of titles now crowding the software shelf with the word "multimedia" stamped on them. Some companies seem to think just distributing their software on a CD is enough to qualify them for this label ("Hey, it has pictures. It makes noises. It's multimedia!"), others make minor changes to their disk-based products, or glue on a few minutes of tedious canned video that adds nothing to the game play. Only a very few have actually made the storage available on a CD



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UNDERGROUND



A large, talented team of artists provides Shadowfist *with attractive art. A player with nothing but the basic set can compete with a heavy-duty collector. Find the rarer cards just to get a look at the art.*

work to genuinely enhance their product. For graphic adventure games, I can count those that use CD to good advantage on two hands. Wait, make that two fingers: Lucasart's *Day of the Tentacle*, and now *Discworld*. If you had to squeeze either onto normal disks, the loss of voices and little flourishes would leave you with entirely different—and lesser—products.

Discworld is funny. The books are funny; the game is funny. The best chance to experience the humor comes when Rincewind converses with the other characters. In most situations, you'll be able to choose between several things that the bumbling wizard can say. Unlike many games which put the words on screen and let you pick from a list, you don't know in advance exactly what comments Rincewind is about to voice, all you know is the tone. You can have him deliver a more diplomatic, polite comment. Or you can go with something tinged with a little wit and sarcasm. Or you can go for the throat. As you might expect, the tone you take with the characters has quite a lot to say about how they respond. Get too snippy with the wrong guy, and you might find this a very short adventure. Don't get tough enough, and you can go around in circles for days.

If you make the right comments, Rincewind will have quite a large adventure and visit territories far and wide. You'll spend some time exploring the elaborate digs of the ancient magic school, learn your way around the nearest town, and spend a brief sojourn nestled within the more than ample cleavage of an extraordinarily well endowed goddess.

One very nice feature of this game is something you'll never see until you *stop* playing. Left on his own for an extended period, Rincewind begins to pace around the scene. Eventually, he'll come to "back of the screen," press his face against the glass, and call for the missing player. It's the first game with a built-in screen saver better than half the commercial ones out there.

Just as there are people (read "men") who love *The Three Stooges*, and others (read "women") who can't stand them, British humor tends to divide the world in half. Just as in other imports, this game can be drier than the Sudan in July, then suddenly juvenile. *Discworld* is very British. If you happen to be in the chuckling half, this is one you'll not want to miss. If not, well, maybe they'll come up with a cure.

Shadowfist *(Daedalus Games, Etobicoke, Ontario 416 621 5294).*

There's a store in my town that sells comic books and baseball cards. At least, that's what they sold last year. It still mentions those items on the door, but if you want them, you now have to shove through the crowds to a few lingering racks at the back of the store. All the rest of the shelf space and floor space is now occupied with two undeniable rages. The first is that scourge of everyone over twelve, pogs. The other is suddenly the most ubiquitous form of fantasy gaming, the collectable card game.

Since Wizards of the Coast turned *Magic: The Gathering* from a keen idea into the biggest money maker since the Denver mint, everyone has been trying to get in on the act. At the moment, almost every company entering the field seems to be succeeding. They're selling collectable card games at the computer stores. They're selling them at the grocery store. I'm waiting to be handed a McMagic card with my cheeseburger.

One of these days, this passion for painted cardboard is bound to pass, and card games will have a big shakeout. There are dozens of products competing, and only a few will have enough of a foothold to stay upright when the foundations start to sway. But if standing out from the crowd proves any help, then *Shadowfist* is one game that just may survive.

There are plenty of fantasy elements in *Shadowfist*, but they're not the point of the game. The game play here often has more to do with throwing a punch than casting a spell. *Shadowfist* describes itself as an "action-movie card game." That's not a bad summary, but it doesn't help much in explaining



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the flow of the game. *Shadowfist* draws most heavily from the old "chop suey" movies, which traded on a marginal knowledge of martial arts and mixed in a litter gangsterism, magic, SF...whatever was needed to drive the plot between frequent fights.

Shadowfist takes all those elements and adds some of its own. The players in the game fight as part of a "faction." These secret societies range from sorcerers, to mad scientists, to magical animal men. Each faction has its specialty, and the types of cards available to each group vary greatly. But don't get worried that you'll be limiting yourself to a single strategy before the first card is thrown. *Shadowfist* allows "alliances" between factions, so your deck may contain cards from two, three, or more groups.

Cards contain characters, objects, events, spells, and things not so neatly classified. You draw your cards in six card hands and send characters and blows crashing against your enemy's defenses in an attempt to take over *Feng Shui* sites—places where mystical energy leaks out onto the Earth. Capturing and holding these places is the goal.

If you've already mastered one or more of the other collectable card games, you'll not have much trouble figuring out this one. The terminology is a bit different, and there are some rules that run contrary to games like *Magic*, but overall there are only so many ways to beat each other up with cards. You'll quickly find that winning at *Shadowfist* is less a matter of a lucky draw on the first hand than marshaling your power for attacks. Several minutes may go by before either player has raised the strength to mount an effective attack, but once the cards start flying, you'll find the fists, feet, magic, and mutants all coming at a near frantic pace.

Shadowfist is a collectable card game, and that means that not everyone will have the same cards in their deck. But there seems less difference in the ability between the rare and the more common cards in this set than in other collectable games. From a game play standpoint, this doesn't seem like a bad thing. A player with nothing but the basic set could compete effectively with a heavy-duty collector.

From an esthetic point of view, the *Shadowfist* cards are attractive. Like most companies putting together hundreds of cards, they've used a large pool of artists. To their great credit, the overall quality of the art looks very good, and they've down a fine job of maintaining a kind of company "look." The layout of the cards, by *Magic: The Gathering* designer Jesper Myrfors, is not the most exciting I've seen, but it's effective and clean.

I take back what I said earlier; these are handsome cards. Collectors should hunt down the rarer ones if for no other reason than to get a look at the art. In the swelling sea of collectable card games, *Shadowfist* has three things going for it: a distinctly different theme, attractive artwork, and fun. Sounds like success to me. ❧

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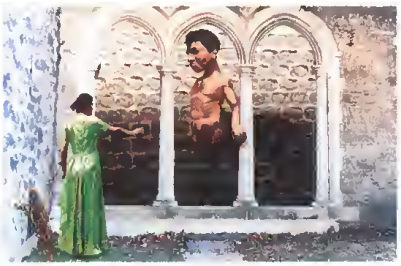




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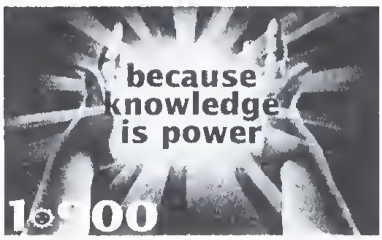
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FROG PRINCE

Continued from page 59

ness of the trumpets' high, brassy notes.

Worst of all had been the horribly brief glimpse of a rider larger than all the others, bound in golden armor, wearing a long, billowing, red cape, and calling out his name over and over in a cracked, frantic lion's roar.

Not that he hadn't loved the pool, loved the modulations of its greenness as he swam this way and that underwater; loved digging into the cool, soft, receiving blackness of its bottom mud; loved to squat waiting on the smooth warmth of its lily pads, letting the hunger lazily grow and watching the buzzing bugs circle overhead, their wings sparkling in the sunlight, until they came too close.

It was a warm July day and he had fed particularly well and was swimming just below the surface with wide, easy strokes when he saw a great, bright pinkness shimmering ahead of him through the water, a blur of color so dazzling that his limbs stopped moving where they were and only his momentum pushed him through the water, closer to that vast glowing, in a dreamy, hypnotized, forward drifting.

The wide, round, golden bulging of his eyes with their long black slits strained past aching to absorb the sight of this gorgeousness as it came nearer and nearer, and he sank into a trance far, far deeper than his tiny pond.

Then the pinkness moved, faceted by the water into an enormous, glittering wall of multitudinous shades of rose and pale reds, and he realized how huge, how tremendous the thing that made it must be, and backed away speedily, sculling to the security of the far end of the pond and a cluster of willow roots where he cowered behind the slimy stems a moment, gathering himself and letting his heart slow so its pounding didn't frighten him quite so much.

But the pinkness continued to fascinate him absolutely, and he found himself slowly and carefully raising his head, keeping his eyes the highest part of him until they gently and very quietly broke the surface of the water and stared directly at a beautiful woman kneeling by the side of the pond and smiling intently into its mysteries.

The pinkness had been her face and neck and shoulders and arms leaning over the surface of his pond. The rest of her was clad in a long, green dress flecked with gold and had blended with the water. Her hair was a piled mass of gold and Frog knew he must have taken it for the sun.

He realized, then and there, that he would love her always and forever, hopelessly and beyond redemption. Clinging to the smooth curving of a willow root with his tiny, emerald forefeet, he gazed at her with a helpless wonder for long, uncounted minutes. His ordinarily unnoticed blood stirred strangely within and seemed to warm him and he almost half believed that he could sense it taking on a redness in his veins.

It began to dawn on him, watching her make one precious, unforgettable, irreplaceable move of her body after another, that he had been alone in his quiet little pond for a long, long while. He observed her slim, pale, perfect fingers trail along the surface of the water and was astonished to realize how far ago that day of hoof poundings and harsh trumpet blasts and hoarse shoutings of his name must have been. He watched her darling arm straighten as she stretched forward to gently nudge a floating leaf and was amazed to see how faint and dim and blurred with time the recollections of his castle and his father's face had grown in his mind.

With an incredible effort, he tore his eyes from his beloved and let himself slide noiselessly down the willow root to the soft, yielding mud at the bottom of the pond, and then he walked on the tips of his toes over the vagueness of the mud's dim, uncertain surface until he came to a little heap of algae-covered rocks. He moved the stones gently to one side and then carefully dug into the bit of mud which they had marked. At first his gropings only found deeper mud, and a terrible anxiety swept through him, but then he clawed just a little further and felt a flood of enormous relief when the pale little pads on the ends of his front feet made contact with a smooth, hard, curving surface.

He reached down, and when all his green digits were curled around the object hidden under the mud, he pulled mightily with every bit of strength in his stout little body and at last, with a wet sucking and a dark, swirling cloud of mud, he pulled out his treasure.

It was a lovely, great ruby carved beautifully into the shape of a heart, and as he gently stroked the mud from its surface, it glowed brightly, even here, in the deepest, darkest corner of the pond. It had stayed with him, he had no idea why or how, through his losses and transformations, and through all the endless aeons which had passed over him since.

He had always suspected there was something wonderful and magical about it, it had always been a great source of hope, and now, holding it with a clear plan forming easily and effortlessly in his mind, he was sure of it. He knew, in the deepest part of his speckled green body, that he and it had been waiting together in this lonely pool all along, through all these stretching years, for just this moment.

He fondled it, clutched it to his breast, hugged it fiercely, and then, gripping it as firmly as he could with all his might in both his tiny front feet, he kicked his way up through the whole height of the pond to the underside of a large lily pad.

He peered carefully and cautiously out from under the pad, and when he was sure his beloved's gaze was thoroughly absorbed elsewhere, he climbed over the pad's edge and sat on its exact center. He arranged his small body carefully, folding the roundness of his legs neatly along his sides, and spread-

ing the toes in order to show off their webbing to their best advantage. Then, lifting his head just so in order that the curve of the bulge of flesh under his chin might echo exactly the swelling of his belly in the classic frog mode, he held the heart-shaped ruby toward her, and waited patiently, breathing tiny, anxious breaths and gazing at her with his wide, adoring eyes.

She turned and saw him and at first she only smiled affectionately with a slow parting of her lovely red lips at the sight of the little fat, green creature, but then a look of curiosity grew in her eyes as she noticed the heart-shaped ruby and the oddly human way he held it, and then her curiosity in turn changed to wonder when she saw the tiny, golden crown which rested on the flat, green-speckled top of Frog's head.

Very carefully, doing all as gracefully as he possibly could, Frog bent and placed the ruby on the pad before him. Then he made a formal little bow, stepped back, and waited again.

The ruby glistened on the lily pad, looking more like a drop of liquid than a solid thing. The beloved reached out in its direction, moving gently, keeping her eyes on Frog to make sure she was not startling him, and touched the ruby cautiously with the tip of the softly curving, delicately pink nail of her forefinger. Only after she saw Frog solemnly blink his bulging, golden eyes and nod approvingly did she take hold of the ruby between her finger and thumb and lift it from the leaf's waxy surface.

She held it up before her face, turning it as she did so, and her lovely eyes widened as she watched the sun shine through its heart-shaped redness in endlessly wonderful ways. Frog watched from his lily pad, confident that the magic would work on its own, that his salvation was approaching, that this endless time of solitude was coming to its end, and that all of it had served a purpose.

Eventually her gaze traveled slowly from the ruby to the little frog, and a look of understanding crossed her face. She took the heart-shaped jewel between her fingertips and pressed it to the center of her chest, just above the parting of her breasts, and as she and Frog watched together, it sank gently into her flesh.

She sat a moment longer, her fingers resting quietly over her beating heart, and then she leaned forward and gathered Frog's small body up in her sweet hands, and lifted him closer and closer to the full, round, swelling of the softness of her lips.

"And this is where you wake up," sighed Doctor Neiman, making yet another note in his little book. "Always, this is where you wake up."

Frog turned his head to the wall and felt the burning tears cascading from his bulging eyes, felt them scald his puffy cheeks, sear the whole wide gape of his lips, and tumble from him onto the disposable paper cover of the pillow on the couch.

"Yes," he croaked. "Always." ❧



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RADIOMANCER

Continued from page 63

So I hit the red button, and all the TVs turn off.

The silence is like when you've been front row at a concert; you know people are talking at you but all you hear is ringing. I open the door and Rhonda falls all over me.

Radiomancer stumbles out after me. "We gotta go stop 'em," I say. Though from what I don't know.

"Not *we*," he answers. "The power has passed, Bubblegum. You're Radiomancer now." He opens his shirt—not a pretty sight—and pulls off a necklace of little plastic triangles strung on fishwire.

"These are the picks of guitar heroes," he says, "martyrs who gave their lives and sanity to create the messages." He puts it around my neck, then turns around and gets back into the van and slams the door. A minute later it takes off. Assholes left the key in.

I shrug and go into the fast-food joint.

The Videodroids are at the counter, staring up at the menu. They think they have to make a right choice.

"Get the dog outta here," says the manager. Everyone behind the counter is teenage and pimply, with subtle emanations of power in their greasy halos. The speakers play *There's something happening here, what it is ain't exactly clear.*

"It's their dog," I grin. The Droids are upset enough with me being alive, and now they're noticing the van is gone.

Rhonda growls, and quicker than a station break, she's chasing them down the access road.

"You going to order?"

So I order any old burger and go sit down; it's the process, not the details. I've got a seat by the window, can see Rhonda trotting back to the car.

There's a wallet on the floor by my foot—eelskin, nice, order-by-mail. I pick it up. The busboy stops by my table. "Look at that," he says, opening it.

There's a gold card inside, nothing else. He tries to pull it out, can't. The folks at the next table try too, no dice.

So I take the wallet, grasp the gold card and pull. It comes loose, there's a quick sharp reflection of light, and the letters on the card rearrange to form my name. Look out, pretty mama, I'm on the road again!

I pocket the card and stand. The song above changes. *I've been to the desert on a horse with no name.*

The busboy, cleaning my meal away, says "You know, I've always wondered what that song means."

I can't enlighten him. Magic has limits.

Rhonda and I hit the interstate again. I flip on the radio. Farm report, news, a ball game, then *This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.* And the road is clear and straight. ❧

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GECKOS

Continued from page 57

throws Katie out of the bed and onto the floor. As she is picking herself up, a second impact tosses her down again. John is flattened against the bed; she envies the grip his many toes can maintain on any surface. A third colossal thump shakes her, then a fourth. All she can imagine is that the Pioneer Flour mill a block away has blown up.

Dust sifts through the air, and she hears frantic car alarms and sirens wailing from all directions. It is very dark for midmorning. She makes it to her feet finally and throws open the window shutters. A pink pillar the size of a sequoia rises from a flattened tangle of wisteria and anaqua.

Petey leads a barking, hissing, trilling chorus of geckos into the room and dances about her feet. Elijah appears in the doorway; he is quivering like a spaniel and repeating over and over, "He is here." John rises from the bed and shakes himself. Turning to Katie, he bows his head to her and asks, "Will you come with us?"

Now, when it is too late to make any difference, she is suddenly wary. "Wh-where?"

"We are going to greet our king."

Outside the window, a terrible neck bends, and an enormous, lidless, *familiar* eye confronts Katie. "No," she says, backing across the room until the wall stops her. "*No* no no no no."

John crouches in front of her and gathers her swollen, peeling hands in his. "Come with us," he trills, and when she just looks at him blankly, he adds something she has never heard any of the lizards say: "*Please.*"

She cannot answer. She can only stare back at that golden eye and tremble. The frontier coils and lashes within her, but she is afraid.

John sings a sweet, agonized note, and turns away. He leads a parade of geckos out of the room. She does not hear the front door open, but since when have human walls ever been a bar to the geckos? A moment later, Katie sees John, Elijah, and the small geckos troop across the yard. The eye releases her and turns to regard its subjects.

Petey has stayed behind. He climbs to his accustomed spot on Katie's shoulder and presses his belly against her skin. She tastes the air, senses Petey's unhappiness and, outside, great celebration and expectation.

"Don't you want to go with them?" she asks.

"Yes," he trills, "but I won't leave you."

In the face of so much courage, how can she fear? The choice is not so hard, after all. Her claws scrabble uselessly against the doorknob for a moment, then she is through. The tail makes balance a challenge. She adapts.

A new day has dawned. An old order is restored. Tearing the last shreds of skin from her bright, shiny, new scales, Petey barking madly on her shoulder, Katie runs to meet her god. ❧

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Contributors

S.N. Dyer is a Nebula Award loser and lives with a six-toed cat (Hemingway also had six-toed cats. I suspect it's because they like to retouch manuscripts. Or occasionally just erase one.).

Brian Stableford was born in Shipley, Yorks in 1948. He was a lecturer in sociology at the University of Reading until he became a full-time writer in 1988. He has published about forty SF/fantasy novels, including *The Empire of Fear* (1988) and *Young Blood* (1992), and is a prolific writer of nonfiction about these fields. His most recent novel is *Serpent's Blood*, published by Legend (UK) in 1995; this is the first volume of a trilogy to be completed by *Salamander's Fire* and *Chimera's Cradle*. A collection of essays on various SF/fantasy writers, *Algebraic Fantasies and Realistic Romances*, was recently published by the Borgo Press. He has written numerous articles for John Clute's forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (to be published by Orbit in 1996).

Gahan Wilson's cartoons are known chiefly because of his association with *Playboy*, but have shown up in periodicals as diverse as *The New Yorker*, *Weird Tales*, *Gourmet*, *Punch*, *Paris Match* and the cover of *Newsweek*. He's also written a number of children's' books in addition to spooky stories and mysteries for grownups.

He has recently begun experimenting in two new fields: the comic book form, having done books on Poe and Ambrose Bierce with new projects underway; and in films he recently completed his first animated movie, a gruesome cartoon short for 20th Century Fox called *Gahan Wilson's Diner*, and a ROM disk interactive game called *Gahan Wilson's Haunted House*.

David Beck's artwork has won numerous awards from the Society of Illustrators and Communication Arts. His work has graced the pages of *Science Fiction Age* and *Realms of Fantasy* several times in the past year. His original canvases are avidly collected: The Grateful Dead own thirteen or more of his pieces.

Jon Foster is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design. His artwork has appeared in *Aboriginal*, and will soon appear in the second part of an adaptation of the novel *Neuromancer*.



David Beck



Alan M. Clark

Beverly Suarez-Beard is a Clarion West graduate and a recent winner in the Writers of the Future Contest. Her stories have appeared in *Writers of the Future, Vol. XI* and in *Century*. A former physicist, she lives in Florida, where she is working on a novel set in a world based on pre-classical Greece.

Carrie Richerson's writing destiny finally caught up to her in 1990 and latched its fangs deep. Since then her stories have appeared in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Amazing Stories*, *Pulphouse*, *Noctulpa*, *The Year's Best Horror Stories XXI*, and *Phobias 2*; and she has twice been nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for best new writer in the science fiction field. A transplanted Texan, Carrie now lives in the Chicago area.



Beverly Suarez-Beard



Brian Stableford

Alan M. Clark was born in Nashville, Tennessee. Ten years ago he became a freelance illustrator and has since produced illustrations ranging in subject from fantasy, science fiction, horror, and mystery for publishers of fiction, to cellular and molecular biology for college textbooks. His awards include a World Fantasy Award (The Howard), two Chesley awards for best interior illustration, and the International Horror Critic's Guild Award.

Web Bryant's artistic skills cross many disciplines in commercial art. The graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University was part of the design team that created *USA Today*. Other achievements: art directing the first national children's newspaper, *Pennywhistle Press*; creating national award-winning maps and graphics; and being commissioned to paint portraits of a Supreme Court justice and corporate CEOs. His first love is painting, especially when he can work with the wonders of natural and directional light. **Eric Niderost** teaches U.S. History in California, but his passion is movies. His interests include Golden Age films as well as contemporary ones. He has written about movies for a number of publications and has interviewed such stars as Vincent Price and Melanie Griffith. Not content with viewing films, he has also been an extra in some sixty TV and movie productions.

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